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ISAAC LEESER AND THE OCCIDENT

Jonathan V. Plaut

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the requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

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Referee: Professor Ellis Rivkin

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To my beloved wife, Carol:

A woman of valor, who can find? for her price is far above rubies.
She looked well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.
She giveth food to her household, and a portion to her maidens.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and the law of kindness is on her tongue.
Strength and dignity are her clothing; and she laugheth at the time to come.
Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her: "Many daughters have done valiantly, but thou excellest them all."
Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

(Prov. 31:10-31)

DIGEST

This thesis attempts to relate the significant contributions Isaac Leeser has made for Jews in America during the nineteenth century by conveying a profile of life during Leeser's era and a more specific view of Philadelphia, Leeser's home. By surveying Leeser's life and activities as described in the Occident, one can delve into Leeser's ardent efforts for better Jewish education and also his life-long struggle with Reform.

The first chapter sets the overall historical picture of the period immediately preceeding and during Leeser's era in Europe and America. New struggles and different feelings spread throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. In America, the country was rapidly expanding, creating numerous opportunities for all its citizens. Jews contended with the growing number of Ashkenazic Jews who were slowly outnumbering the well-established Sephardic population. Many prominent Jews played significant roles in America during this period of history.

The second chapter illustrates how the Philadelphian community developed into a prominent American city and how Mikveh Israel, Leeser's congregation until 1850, struggled for permanent existence during its early years. Philadelphia soon became the most influential city in America for all economic and social activities. Philadelphia was Leeser's home from 1829 until his death, and this environment shaped much of his thinking.

The third chapter describes Isaac Leeser's life and activities from his birth until his death in 1868 in Philadelphia. A brief re-

sumé of his contributions to the American Jewish scene is given in this chapter.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, Isaac Leeser's efforts to improve Jewish education is elucidated through information gathered from Leeser's monthly periodical, The Occident. The sixth chapter explains the life-long struggle Leeser had with Reform by following the growing strife between such personalities as Poznanski, Mayer, and Wise.

In the final chapter, a brief analysis is given of Leeser's personality, motivations, goals, and strivings which effected his work on behalf of American Judaism. Leeser's contributions and failures on behalf of American Jewry are examined. Few people have appreciated the contribution Isaac Leeser has forever stamped upon the American Jewish scene.

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CHAPTER I

PROFILE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, 1750 - 1850.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the turmoil of the French and American Revolutions which dominated the affairs of men in Europe and America, had ended. It was during the nineteenth century that there were new concerns for the strivings and amplification of democracy, intellectual and religious freedom and social and economic life. Rationalism furnished the necessary impetus for attacks against political and economic evils during the eighteenth century. Romanticism supplied the emotional fervor behind a drive for liberty in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The rationalism of the eighteenth century was insufficient to create a rationally organized society that could elevate the status and dignity of men. Disillusioned with the rationality of men in their search for a better society, the rationalistic era led into a romantic movement. Urged on by an enthusiastic faith in man, the men of the romantic movement rebelled against forms of political oppression and social injustice.

Closely allied to the romantic movement of the nineteenth century, the uniqueness of the individual and his rights created another powerful emotional force during this period. This was nationalism, which gathered idealists from all parts of Europe to give expression to national consciousness. Common bonds between people through a common language, history, or cultural tradition set one nation apart from another. In turn, feelings of superiority generated tensions between the groups or nations. Nationalism developed with tremendous romantic fervor until 1848, when authoritarianism crushed the hopes of men for some decades. The anticipation of political advancement was defeated

in France, Italy, Prussia and the Austrian empire.

In addition to the romantic and nationalistic tempo of the nineteenth century, liberalism reached the forefront in the 1830's. Liberalism was closely associated with the aspirations of the middle class. Liberalism affirmed the dignity of man and his inherent rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". While radical romanticism stood for revolution as a justifiable method of change, liberalism stood for gradual changes within the governmental system. Liberalism sought to work out with individuals of similar interests a durable political structure to insure maximum freedom against external authority. In many ways, liberalism was the desire of men to be left alone. In economic terms, liberalism was an advocacy of laissez-faire. It was only natural that liberalism should have appealed to the rising class of industrial entrepreneurs who were in the process of transforming the economy of Europe in the nineteenth century. Naturally the middle class demanded increasing political power commensurate with their new economic strength.

Their economic influence was structured by another major force of this period. Between 1815 and 1870, society was influenced by industrialism. Steam engines and railways appeared on the scene. With the new machines and their factories, new industrial towns emerged which produced a new urban life. The struggle between the owners of the factories and the constantly discontented industrial workers was a major theme throughout this century. For many, Darwin's theory of evolution seemed to hold out the hope for progress. Many also felt that through realism, rationalism and even ruthlessness their goals could be achieved. The nineteenth century combined all these forces in Europe.

The European influences during the nineteenth century spread to all parts of the world, especially to the North American continent. The rising influence of the middle class, the search for political equality and a better living standard, and the persuasive force of nationalism, were important factors in America. Naturally, there were certain conditions and problems which were unique to the United States, for this country was faced with the challenge of geographical exploration, the problem of the Indians, and the need to develop a distinctive life style. The Revolutionary War did not displace the language, law, philosophy, religion, and literary influences of the mother country, England, with the result that when the nineteenth century was ushered in, there was as yet little feeling for national unity in America. The United States was certainly not a democracy. Religious and property requirements still set limits on participation in governmental affairs. The state was largely in the hands of established families of the South and the men of wealth and substance of the North.

Westward expansion gave an impetus to the development of democracy. As the pioneers moved over the Appalachian Mountains into the woods of the West, the social system of wealth and family status of the Eastern Seaboard colonial states was challenged by the pioneers whose social system sustained such values as courage, independence, and energy rather than birth or wealth. The westward expansion challenged ideas prevalent in the conservative areas of the United States. The success of the steamboat helped to move the pioneers to the West. After the war of 1812, five new states were added to the Union and by 1820 there were nine states west of the Appalachians. Between 1800 to 1860 the westward expansion progressed at an amazing pace. In 1803,

Jefferson purchased from France the Louisiana territory which doubled the size of the United States. Following the war with Mexico in 1846, all of Texas, California and the land between these two states became part of the United States under terms of the treaty. The same year as the war with Mexico, the United States settled a disagreement with Britain which secured for them the Oregon territory. Despite the widening of areas of western settlement, democracy progressed very slowly.

In 1828, Andrew Jackson was elected to the presidency. He was the first president from the new West; the first (except for Washington) without a college education; and the first to have been born in poverty. Jackson's election to the presidency was a triumph for democratic ideals, setting, as it did, a course of political development that even today has not spent its course. With his election, the idea that any man could hold office in the country gained currency. Furthermore, class status became less important as government became more responsive to the needs of the common man. Education was expanded so as to open up a public school system for all children.

With the expansion of the country, and the election of Jackson, the United States followed, during the first part of the nineteenth century, a policy of isolationism. The primary energies of the country were concentrated on continental expansion and economic development. There was little interest in foreign policy except when it had a direct bearing on vital domestic goals. Yet, America did take an interest in furthering and protecting foreign trade, and did sympathize with and at times even encourage the expansion of freedom in various parts of the world. Yet the overall policy of isolationism had an inherent logic.

Why should America become involved in the affairs of Europe?

Expansion into recently acquired territory raised the issue of whether slavery should be permitted. Slavery became a fundamental issue of the nineteenth century, unleashing tension between the North and South, and dividing the country into separate nations. The North was industrial, urban, and democratic; the South, agricultural, rural, and aristocratic. The Civil War brought all the economic struggles and sectional interests to a head.

The quest for freedom that had sparked revolutions in Europe in 1830 and 1848, likewise contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War. The war, however, settled only one issue: the United States was a federal nation not a collection of states. National unity was a basic principle in Germany, Italy and Austria, and the desire for expanding democratic freedoms in the Jacksonian era had its parallel in the revolutions of 1848 in Europe.

While Europe was battling to overthrow Napoleon, the United States was struggling with the problems let loose by their new-found freedom. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the United States was expanding westward while Europe was wrestling with her new feelings of nationalism, liberalism, and with the industrialization process. By the middle of the century, Jacksonian democracy had brought to the United States a feeling of equality among all men, while Europeans, learning of the new achievements in America, tried to secure for themselves equivalent freedoms. But the European struggles during mid-century only ended in failure. Later, America fought a bloody sectional war, while European nations tried to secure their own national destiny.

During this period of ferment Jews also struggled to assure their

own survival. For the Jews there was no opportunity to establish a nation of their own. Spread throughout a vast diaspora, the Jews attempted to survive, through adaption, among the nations of Europe. The Jews tacked to with the changing tides. The French Revolution had kindled hope for all peoples, and had aroused expectations of emancipation for the Jews. But, the spark of hope was quickly extinguished when Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo in 1815. With Napoleon's defeat, Jews immigrated in large numbers to the United States. What happened to the Jews during this period is our present concern.

The first immigration of Jews to America was a slow steady flow of Jews to the shores of the United States. The first Jewish settlers were of Spanish-Portuguese extraction. Although the Sephardic immigrants continued to come, even larger waves of German immigrants soon outnumbered them. Before the revolution there had been only 2,500 Jews in America;[1] after the revolution they had numbered only 3,000, by 1840, 15,000. Yet the immigration of Jews to America was slower, proportionally, to the increase of the general population.[2]

The early Jewish settlers were ambitious and courageous families, willing to make sacrifices and even risks to secure their liberties. The opportunity to come to a free land, to leave relatives and friends, to survive the journey across the ocean, to dwell in unsettled wilderness, to venture after a new livelihood, and to learn a new language, testify to the hardy courage and determination of the Jewish immigrants.[3] The succeeding Sephardic immigrants were peddlers or small merchants, some owned their own stores. On the whole, these immigrants who came before the nineteenth century were wealthier than the new immigrants who came from Germany in the nineteenth century.[4] The Sephardic Jews

were very proud of their tradition. They viewed themselves as the Jewish aristocracy, and even separated themselves from non-Sephardic Jews, by frowning on intermarriage even though they accepted them into the synagogue. The Sephardim came from Spain and Portugal or from Holland and England immediately after the Inquisition. Some of the early Jews came from all parts of South America. Later, the Jews came from Turkey, Greece and Egypt. Their descendants had fled to these countries from the days of the Inquisition.[5]

The new German-Jewish immigration was comprised of middle class workers, merchants, and poor laborers.[6] The German Jews began immigrating to the United States in 1815, and this wave of immigration continued until the end of the century. Of the five million Germans who came to America during this time, 200,000 were Jews. From a population of 15,000 Jews in 1840, the number soared to 250,000 in 1880. The Sephardic population was quickly outnumbered by the mass immigration of German Jews.[7]

The migration of the German Jews was set off by the Napoleonic wars which had left Germany in terrible economic straits. There was little hope for recovery in the immediate future. Germany was a confederation of states without any central government; each state attempting to attain its own autonomy and liberty. In many of these states, the Jews suffered under medieval restrictions. The German Jews had been required to live in ghettoes, to wear badges or special Jewish clothes. At times these German Jews were forced to bribe law officers.[8] The governments were reactionary in government, politics, and industry especially with respect to Jews. Not just Jews, but Catholics and Protestants fled from Germany to America. The non-

Jewish immigrants sought freedom in the backlands of the West and mid-western America. Some Jews remained on the coast, yet other German Jews followed the movement westward, settling in new towns in the recently acquired territory.[9]

The German Jews, like so many others who came to America during trying times, experienced the cramped conditions in the bellies of rotten ships. Food, water and lavatories were scarce. The immigrants were forced to survive a voyage where the stench, insufficient food and water, left diseased or dead bodies throughout the hold of the ships.[10] One traveler writes in 1869 the following:

> "If the crosses and the tombstones could be created in the waters as on the western deserts, where they indicate the resting places of white men killed by the savages or by the elements, the routes of immigrant vessels from Europe to America would have assumed the appearance of crowded cemeteries."[11]

Such accounts from the voyager's experiences in 1869 indicate that all immigrants to America experienced the worst traveling conditions. Passengers were treated worse than cattle.

The Honorable Fred Myers describes the deplorable traveling conditions of the Jews:

> "If Europe were to present us with three hundred thousand cattle per year, ample means would be employed to secure their proper protection and distribution, but thus far the general movement has done but little to diminish the numerous hardships of an immigrant's position. Since Congress has assumed the power to protect dumb animals in transit on railways, the power to protect passengers may be conceded."[12]

Jews were exploited both on ship and when they first disembarked in the new land. Soon they plunged into the new way of life in America. They took off the garments of the old country for those of their new

homeland. With the external changes, went also the mannerisms, tempo, color, habit and way of life of the new land.[13]

The German Jew was a hard working, honest, uneducated person who was a good business man. The German Jew began by peddling his wares throughout the South and West of America. This condition was only temporary. For the German Jew desired to learn, a tradition he knew both from his Jewish heritage and from German culture. The German Jews did not remain peddlers for very long. In the beginning, they moved very slowly throughout the countryside, showing to all the interested people their assorted ribbons, combs, brooches, and other trinkets. They also conversed with the men about the situations on the Eastern seaboard. Soon the intelligence, ambition, determination, and aggressiveness of the German Jew paid off. After working for several months, the German Jews would send one-half of their savings to their relatives back in Europe; the other half would go for a horse and cart. Soon the business bent of the German Jews permitted them to settle in villages where the future seemed promising. The German Jew was not a farmer; he was a merchant. In the village, he became a shop owner, buying and selling his merchandise to the townsmen.[14]

The opportunities in the West were not overlooked by the German Jews. It was only natural that as the West was opened to adventurous settlers, the German Jews would peddle their wares there and even settle in some of the remote places.

> "He went South, made his way through great plantations, fascinated the beautiful daughters of rich slave owners with his wares and his stories. He went West, to Illinois and Ohio and Iowa and Wisconsin, to Oregon and Texas. His foot touched the soil of California and

> Nevada, the red-jawed hills of Utah looked down upon him, the Rio Grande ran sluggishly at his feet."[15]

The German Jews who came to America enriched the Judaism existing here at the time. The pulse-beat quickened with the arrival of the German element. Jewish cconsciousness, religiosity and feelings were infused with new life. Even the synagogue resounded with renewed reverence. The German Jew had established himself economically and socially. As the Sephardic element lost numerical superiority and influence, they displayed their feelings of prejudice towards the German immigrants. However much the proud Sephardic element found the uneducated, poor, German Jews alien, it could not prevent the rising tide of numbers and the economic and social advancement of the German Jews.

As was to be expected, some outstanding personalities emerged during this period who contributed to both American and Jewish life, such as Urial Levy, Mordecai Manuel Noah, Judah Touro, and Rebecca Graetz.

Urial P. Levy was a Philadelphian who distinguished himself as a sailor in the service of his country. From his boyhood days, he loved the sea. By 1803, at the age of eleven, he became a cabin boy; three years later he was apprenticed as a sailor. By 1810, he was a second mate of the brig, "Polly and Betsey". His enthusiasm for the sea did not fade. Before he was twenty, he was a part owner of a schooner, "George Washington". When, mutinous sailors aboard the schooner in 1812, overpowered him, and took possession of his vessel, and stripped him of his money, Levy returned to the United States, persuaded some people to give him money, and pursued the mutineers. Finding the mutineers, he brought them back to the United States for

trial and hanging.[16]

When the War of 1812 broke out, Levy received his commission as sailing master in the United States Navy. Aboard the "Argus", he assisted in the capture of several vessels. Later, he was given command of one ship, whereupon he attempted to seize a British vessel; however, the British vessel overpowered him and seized his vessel and took him as a prisoner of war to England. After sixteen months imprisonment, the United States, remembering his bravery, promoted him to Lieutenant.[17]

The remaining forty years of his life, Levy fought against prejudice both as a sailor promoted from the ranks, and as a Jew. He was court-martialed six times for killing his opponents in duels. His rivals were overjoyed when he was dropped from the list of captains, yet they were astonished when he was restored to his former rank after a special Court of Inquiry in 1855. The more the prejudice, the more his persistence. Before his death, he had attained the rank of commodore, the highest rank in the Navy.[18]

Levy was a loyal Jew. While appearing before the court of inquiry in 1855, he said:

> "My parents were Israelites, and I was nurtured in the faith of my ancestors. In deciding to adhere to it, I have but exercised a right guaranteed to me by the constitution of my state and the United States, a right given to all men by their Maker. But while claiming this right, I have even accorded it to all men, and, as an officer of the Navy, I have treated each and every one as a man and never as a partisan or sectarian."[19]

Levy was also a loyal American, and an admirer of Thomas Jefferson. He gave his home in Monticello as a Jefferson memorial. A naval officer,

a Jew, and defender of the rights of man--this was Urial P. Levy.

Mordecai Manuel Noah was another interesting personality. He was a journalist, diplomat, judge, visionary, and Zionist before Zionism was born. Noah was from Portuguese stock, born in Philadelphia, orphaned at four, and cared for by his grandfather, John Phillips. His grandfather sent him off to learn a trade as a carver, but his interests led him into writing. He received a partial education by studying a few hours a day, and attending the library at night. His talents soon drew the attention of Robert Morris, who arranged to have his apprentice paper cancelled, and secured a position for him as a clerk in the auditors office of the United States Treasury.[20] When the capital of the country was moved to Washington, Noah resigned his job at the age of 15, taking a position as a newspaper reporter. Later he studied law, and edited the Charleston City Gazette. He rewrote some old plays for an amateur theatrical group. But his heart was set on a political career. His radical ideas caused problems for him in Charleston. During the War of 1812 he wrote his first play, "The Orphan of the Rhine", which brought him huge success. He wrote numerous periodicals and plays. President Madison appointed him American Counsel in Tunis, and chief negotiator in securing the release of an American crew seized by Algeria. Yet, in traveling to his post, he was captured by the British, and after some delay, allowed to proceed to his post. The Algerians were tough negotiators who persuaded Noah to pay several thousand dollars more than was allocated to him.[21] To his regret, he was recalled from his post. The message which James Monroe, Secretary of State at the time, sent to him affected the rest of his life. The message said:

> "At the time of your appointment, as Counsel at Tunis it was not known that the religion which you profess would form any obstacle to the exercise of your counselor functions. Recent information, however, on which entire reliance may be placed, proves that it would produce a very unfavorable effect. In consequence of which, the president has deemed it expedient to revoke your commission."[22]

Upon his return to America, Noah was vindicated. He settled in New York, editing such papers as the National Advocate, New York Enquirer, Evening Star, Commercial Advertiser and New York Sun. Retaining his love for politics, he accepted several other positions in the ensuing years. Yet Noah's fame rests not on his political or literary achievements, but on his activity as a Jew on behalf of Israel. His life was focused on the desire to establish a secure territory for all persecuted Jews. In 1824 he said:

> "We will return to Zion as we went forth, bringing back the faith we carried with us. The Temple under Solomon which we built as Jews we must again erect as the chosen people. For two thousand years we have been pursued and persecuted, and we are yet here; assemblages of men have formed committees, built cities, established governments, and yet we are here. Rome conquered Greece and she was no longer Greece. Rome in turn became conquered and there are few traces now of the one mistress of the world; yet we are here like the fabled phoenix, ever springing from ashes, or, more typically beautiful like the bush of Moses, which ever burns, yet is never consumed."[23]

Noah shaped his ideas into concrete plans. On three different occasions he proposed plans for a Jewish state in parts of the United States.. But his elaborate plans for the future of Jews ended in dismal failure. Nevertheless, he remained a literary figure of note and political power, despite the censure his plan aroused.[24]

So far we have mentioned two important personalities during the nineteenth century. The major name in this period in Jewish philan-

thropy in America is Judah Touro, the son of a rabbi. Born in Rhode Island, descended from Spanish stock who had lived in Holland since the Inquisition, Judah Touro moved to Jamaica with his family after his father's congregation dispersed. Upon his father's death, his mother moved close to her brother, Moses Hays, a prominent Boston merchant. There Judah Touro was educated and employed in his uncle's business. Unsuccessful in love, Touro moved South to seek his fortune. In New Orleans in 1802, Touro set up a store, selling products from New England. He put his money toward the purchase of ships and property.[25] Upon his death in 1854, he left over a half a million dollars to charity. His charities included hospitals, nearly every Jewish congregation in the country, homes, cemeteries, and almshouses in Jerusalem —all benefited from his generosity. The inscription on his tombstone sums up his achievements.

> "By righteousness and integrity he collected his wealth. In charity and for salvation he dispensed it. The last of his name, he inscribed it in the book of philanthropy.
>
> To be remembered forever." [26]

While mentioning three important men of this age, one should not overlook the contribution of a woman, Rebecca Graetz. She was a Philadelphian of wealth, charm, and beauty. But also, she had great organizational talents besides being a worker herself. She was a devoted Jew, who, legend tells, refused to marry a Christian admirer. During her whole life of 88 years, she never married. She is assumed to be the Rebecca whom Sir Walter Scott drew upon for his heroine in "Ivanhoe". She aided in raising money for orphans, was a member of numerous charities, and was the founder of the first Sunday School in

America, and the president and superintendent for nearly a quarter century. Her contribution to this period in history cannot pass unnoticed.[27]

These four personalities and numerous men and women like them helped to shape life in the nineteenth century. With the Sephardic element firmly established, the German Jews were attempting to establish themselves. Jews in the new world were struggling to erect the necessary organizations such as religious, educational, charitable and social organizations in the communities they loved. Both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic elements of the Jewish community required these organizations. In some communities they supported separate organizations, in others the two communities worked in common union for the benefit of the whole Jewish community.

Even before the nineteenth century, the only Jewish institution for Jews was the synagogue, where all activities were centered. Associated with the synagogue was a cemetery, school, charitable and social activities. The synagogue became the focus of Jewish life for the entire community. Every Jew was associated with it; every Jewish activity originated from it. The synagogue elected a president or parnas, a board of trustees, a treasurer and a hazan or cantor. With the growth of the synagogue, teachers and other staff members were required to care for the community. [28]

The head of the community, both legally and actually was the parnas. The parnas supervised every aspect of the congregation.[29]He had a supreme power over all phases of congregational life. The parnas was charged with establishing the schedule for services, weddings, and dispensed the "honors" among the congregation. Even in 1862, Dr. Morris Raphall, the

rabbi of a synagogue, was forced to ask the parnas for permission to marry his own daughter.[30] In addition, the parnas rendered opinions on ritual law, and supervised the preparation of Matzot and the dispensing of food to the needy.[31] The parnas wielded tremendous authority for both the affiliated and unaffiliated. From one synagogue, Shearith Israel, comes the following announcement made to all members:

> "Whosoever---continues to act contrary to our Holy Law by breaking any of the principle commands will not be deem'd (sic) a member of our congregation, have none of the Mitzote (sic) of the sinagoge (sic) conferred on him and when dead will not be buried according to the manner of our brethren." 32

Another important member of Jewish life was the shohet who was hired by the congregation to slaughter all food according to ritual laws. The food was then issued with the approval of the congregation.[33] The hazan was usually a lay member, who possessed a pleasant voice, who read and taught the children. Under the hazan was the shammez who was superintendent, secretary, and beadle of the congregation.[34]

The synagogue was controlled by powerful presidents during the early life in American Jewry before and after the Revolutionary War. One individual, Gershom Mendez Seixas, best exemplifies the character of synagogual life in a Sephardic congregation during this era.

Seixas, the first native born American hazan, was born in New York in 1745. In 1768, he was elected hazan, charged with numerous duties: preacher, teacher, reader, community servant.[35] Each of his duties was carefully defined. During the war, he tried to influence his congregation through his sermons and prayers, to sympathize with the American cause. Forced to leave New York during the war, he relocated his congregation in Philadelphia, serving his members until his death in 1816.[36]

The synagogue underwent a radical transition during the decades preceeding the Revolutionary War and immediately following it. The small, compact synagogual system, controlled very rigidly, led into a more diversified larger community, divided and scattered in the nineteenth century.

In the Colonial period, the education of the children was given careful supervision. The Yeshibat Minhat Areb was run under the control of Shearith Israel. A full range of courses were offered to the students, covering both English and Hebrew instruction, arithmetic, spelling and literature. Classes ran throughout the year for the entire day. The poor were given free instruction. The costs of the school were covered by tuition fees and community contributions.[37]

The poor were also provided necessary assistance by the congregations. A fund to care for their needs was administered by the parnas and the board of trustees. At Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia, a fund was organized and called Society for Destitute Strangers.[38] Shearith Israel made provisions for the needy in their constitution requiring that a section on charity be read twice a year both in English and Portuguese.

> "If any poor person should happen to come to this place and should want the assistance of the Sinagog (sic) the Parnas is hereby impowered to allow a very poor person for his maintainance the sum of eight shilling per week and no more exceeding the turn of twelve weeks...those poor of this congregation that shall apply for Sedaca shall be assisted with as much as the Parnas and his assistants shall think fit."[39]

The poor were adequately cared for by the synagogue and the members. There was little question who would be provided for--the answer was every Jew.

The Jewish community faced other problems as well. Authority, as

we have seen, was vested in elected officials who retained full control over the affairs of the congregation. Yet, during the major part of the nineteenth century, there was no Jewish legal authority residing in America. In matters entailing legal Jewish decisions, the congregation referred such matters to the chief rabbi in England, who was the final arbiter for the Ashkenazi synagogues, while the Sephardim turned to Amsterdam.[40]

The synagogues were conducted in orthodox tradition. The readers' platform was in the center; the women sat in a gallery upstairs. The Sephardic service differed from the Ashkenazic rite in certain special prayers, and in the pronunciation of Hebrew. The development of these two separate rites was established due to the difference in services and in the social differences existing between them.[41] Yet, in the most fundamental aspects of religious life and theology, the Ashkenazim and Sephardim were one. They agreed in all matters concerning the Torah, the forces of assimilation, and the observance of the Sabbath.

But there was a challenge to the authority of the synagogues in the nineteenth century, causing a breakdown in the general pattern. This challenge became Reform Judaism which first began in Charleston in 1824.[42] There was a radical change in worship initiated by the new congregation, "The Reformed Society of Israelites".[43] Prayers and hymns were read in English. Certain customs and ceremonies were eliminated, services were shortened; instrumental music was introduced, and the worshippers prayed without hats.[44] But the lack of a leading spirit to fight the strong opposition caused the congregation to give up after a few years.

Some years later in 1836, Gustav Posnanski came to the Charleston

community and Beth Elohim. This time when the members requested an organ, Poznanski agreed readily and the ensuing battle of reform did not manifest itself until mid-century under the leadership of Isaac M. Wise and Max Lilienthal.[45] The dissension in Charleston showed that future developments in American Judaism were unavoidable. The closely tied synagogue was a thing of the past. Diversity would reign.

The character of American religious life was radically transformed during the nineteenth century. In the beginning, the immigrants were involved in the changes in the country's territorial, economic, and social transformation. The immigration to America was slow at first; the Sephardim were the first to come to the new world, but after Napoleon was defeated, the European Jewish community departed for America and the prospects of a better life. While the Sephardic element was entrenched in the larger towns of the East, the Ashkenazim moved westward into the newly acquired territories. At first, the Sephardim and Ashkenazim formed synagogues to administer to their total communal and religious requirements. Schools and charities were a central aspect of the congregation. But, as the communities grew, diversity rather than uniformity was introduced into the Jewish communal order. The authority of the officials over the congregation was thwarted by new elements: the expansion of America, the immigration of a large German population which outnumbered the Sephardic community, and the beginning of Reform Judaism on the American scene. The Jewish population had grown significantly during the nineteenth century, diversity, separatism, dissension gripped the Jewish community. Numerous organizations, associations and synagogues were formed, each one claiming to hold the key to Jewish life. With the end of the colonial period communal and spiritual crisis gripped the Jew.

The essential meaning and feelings toward the basis of Judaism were losing their meaning in the new Jewish life in America. The synagogue in the future was to struggle to make a claim upon the people.

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CHAPTER II

JEWS IN PHILADELPHIA IN TRANSITION.

The expulsion of the Jews from Europe during the various periods of history, caused many of the Sephardic families that migrated to America to settle in Philadelphia, where they outnumbered the Ashkenazi throughout the colonial period and for several decades after the Revolution. Philadelphia during the colonial period was an important center. Here the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence, Washington took command of the Continental army, and the Constitution of the United States was framed. Philadelphia was the capital of the colonies until its capture by the British during the war. During the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century it was an important city in America. Philadelphia maintained its importance during nearly all of the nineteenth century, and was the center for political, economic, and social activity during the early decades of American history. It was also the home of many established families, Jews and non-Jews alike. It is not surprising, therefore, that Philadelphia became a prestigious center of Jewish life during the nineteenth century.

Who the first Jewish settler in Philadelphia was still cannot be determined. Possibly it was Isaac Masa who, records show, signed a treaty for fair trade practices in 1657. If so, the first Jews came to Wicago, which was the beginning of Pennsylvania's city.[1] The early settlers exploited the land opportunities; trade grew as did the city. Records during the early period of Pennsylvanian history are scarce. Biblical names were common among Jews as well as non-Jews. In a ledger of William Trent, the name of Jonas Aaron is noted in 1703, but nothing

is known of him.[2] Traders came to Philadelphia to transact business, staying days, weeks or even months. In a receipt book of Thomas Coates, six Jews from New York and the West Indies were in the city between 1706 and 1719.[3] William Penn's secretary, James Logan, had a particular interest in Hebrew although a Christian. He studied Hebrew with the necessary grammars and dictionaries; Hebrew being of real interest to him.[4] But there was no communal structure: no religious services, no kosher meats, no fellow Jews. Intermarriage was very common.

But as the decades of the eighteenth century passed, the increased importance, size, and trade opportunities drew more people to Philadelphia. Nathan Levy came in 1735. Later, David Franks joined Levy as a partner in the shipping business. Confronted with the need of burying his dead child, Levy purchased a plot for the child, who is believed to be the first Jew to be buried in Philadelphia.[5] The Levy's shop and merchant business expanded as regular shipments moved from Philadelphia to London.[6] Another Jew, Isaac Norris, the wealthiest in Philadelphia, imported the famous Liberty Bell, which was transported on one of Levy's ships. David Frank, Levy's partner, gained respectability in Philadelphian society. As the Jewish population increased, Nathan Levy took on the leadership of the Jewish community.

Although records are uncertain, tradition holds that religious services were held on Sterling Alley in 1747.[7] As the numbers grew, the worshippers met at Joseph Cauffman's house in Cherry Alley, between Third and Fourth Streets. An upper story room was arranged for worship. It was during this time that Gershom Mendes Seixas, arrived in the city.[8] It was not long, however, before the Cauffmans' house proved inadequate

for the increasing demands of the Jewish congregation. The records of the new congregation record a meeting assembled on March 24, 1782, to determine the feasibility of securing land for erecting a synagogue.[9] The cornerstone was laid on June 19, 1782, and Rev. Seixas officiated at the service.[10] The synagogue was an imposing structure with a seating capacity of nearly two hundred; the minister's residence being in the rear of the building.[11]

During the intervening years between the first service and the completion of the new synagogue, Philadelphia grew rapidly in size, wealth and social prominence. After Nathan Levy's death, Barnard Gratz came to Philadelphia to work for David Frank. More Jews settled in Philadelphia. Young couples were eager to associate with a synagogue, so that their young children could have a religious identity.[12] Gratz was reassured that with the increased Jewish population seeking kosher meat, it would be profitable to have meat sent to the West Indian islands, once the manner of slaughtering was acceptable to the consumer. So Gratz received a hekhsher from Abraham I. Abraham in New York, stating that the Jews of Barbados could eat the meat shipped by him.[13]

During the 1760's, the Jewish population expanded, numbering nearly one hundred men, women, and children. The majority were of central European origin.[14] Serious illness was widespread snuffing out lives at an appalling rate. During the 1760's also, the Jewish community was functioning like a united community. When in 1768, Jacob Musqueto requested assistance from the Jewish community, financial aid was quickly forthcoming.[15] Soon Philadelphia exceeded the Newport community numerically. Steadily the Jewish population grew. Yet, a handful of individuals continued to predominate. The Gratz, the Nathan, the Heymann,

and the Bush families constituted a sort of aristocratic elite.

The Jewish quarters on Sterling Alley, where the first services were held in Philadelphia, were soon too small for the increased numbers of people. The informality of this organization, also proved inadequate. In July, 1771, the Pennsylvanische Staatsbote, a German newspaper, carried the following news item:

> "On last Saturday in Cherry Alley in this city was opened the first Jews-synagogue, and Jewish divine services were there held."[16]

The Cherry alley synagogue was located on a small cobble stone street, fifteen feet wide, with a few trees shading the houses.[17] Although it was located in the heart of the business district, Cherry Alley was not part of it.

The new quarters on Cherry alley needed to be equipped with numerous items. For one thing, the scroll had previously been a loaned scroll. It was Barnard Gratz who took charge of securing a scroll. He wrote to his friend, Michael Samson of London, to secure for him a sefer Torah. The crowns for the Torah were made in America by Myer Myers of New York, a silversmith and friend of Gratz.[18] The organization of the synagogue was still without any formal structure. Nathan Levy and Mathias Bush had previously acted on behalf of a formless Jewish community, but it was Michael Gratz who took command of the larger community. The first record of February 22, 1777, shows that a meeting took place of the "Mahamad, Kahal Kodesh Mikveh Israel", and the following resolution was passed:

> "Resolved unanimously that in order to support our holy worship and establish it on a more solid foundation, money was needed for the uses of the Synagogue, now established in the city of Philadelphia."[19]

Pledges were subsequently taken; most of the officers of the congregation fulfilled their obligations. Barnard Gratz and Michael Gratz each subscribed ten pounds, so did Levy Marks; Solomon Marache, Henry Marks subscribed five pounds each; Levi Solomon four pounds; and Mordecai Levy three.

Barnard Gratz became the parnas; Solomon Marache became the gabay or treasurer, while Michael Gratz, Henry and Levy Marks, Moses Mordecai, Mordecai Levy, and Levi Solomon became members of the board of directors.[20] Soon the war for freedom would interrupt the work of development. Men and women would be engaged in securing their freedom from the British. Nevertheless, since immigration continued, the Philadelphian Jewish community needed to assist all Jews in the community. The congregation was more essential than ever.

The country was uneasy. "Taxation without representation" was a slogan known to all in the colonies. The spark to ignite the colonists came on April 19, 1775 at Lexington. The Revolutionary war was under way. Immigration preceding the war, created an economic change in the Jewish community of Philadelphia. Besides merchants and shopkeepers, there were Jewish cordwainers, soap, and starch makers, peddlers, tailors and other traders.[21] Not many records of the activities of these smaller tradesmen exist as they seldom advertised, or appeared in the press.[22] But, these traders did become part of the Jewish community. Some did not associate with a synagogue; however, many did affiliate, increasing the number of members involved in the communal activities. Kosher meat was already available. So was a charity fund for aid to the poor. In June, 1776, Michael Gratz employed Abraham Levy to be

assisted by his son in the duties of a "Jewish Killer, Reader in the Synagogue and to teach six children the art of reading the Hebrew tongue."[23] The important members of Philadelphian Jewry were engaged in the affairs of the country. Again we meet the name of David Franks who was tight-roping between the American and British lines. He was tried for comforting the British, but was found not guilty. During the succeeding years, his loyalties were occasionally in question. While Franks was having problems with proving his loyalty to the American cause, other Jews were joining the militia.[24]

Philadelphia was the capital city, the chief seaport securely in American hands, the seat of government, and the asylum for countless patriots who flocked to the city, making living quarters nearly impossible to secure. The majority of the Jews came to Philadelphia from New York. Life under the British would have been unbearable. The cause for American independence was utmost in their mind. One such individual who sought asylum in Philadelphia was a man whose genius to discount foreign notes and convert them into cash, saved the new government from its most difficult problem during the war. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1778 without money, but soon he became responsible for the country's financial affairs. This man was Haym Salomon.

Salomon was born in 1740 in Poland. Fire and oppression forced many of the inhabitants to flee the country. Salomon was acquainted with foreign commerce and numerous languages on his arrival in America. It is still a mystery how he first made a living. In one document, he is described as a distiller, which must have been his old occupation in Poland. Salomon was quick to ally himself with the American cause.[25]

There is very little available to convey to us a picture of Salomon's early life in Philadelphia until 1780. With his knowledge of foreign exchange he seems to have established himself in this field by 1781. In February, 1781, an advertisement appeared in the Philadelphian press noting that there were "a few bills of exchange on France, St. Eustatia and Amsterdam, to be sold by Haym Salomon, Broker".[26] From modest beginnings without an office, he became an establised broker in the office of finance. In 1781, he offered "Bills on Holland, France, Spain, England, St. Croix, etc."[27] When Robert Morris was appointed the superintendent of the Office of France, there was a great need for the government to turn foreign bills of exchange into cash. There was a great demand for a person knowledgable in European finance and unquestionable credit. Haym Salomon had such qualifications.[28] Although the military struggle was concluded in 1781, the financial battle was not won. Speculation attempted to undermine the American cause.[29] Throughout the process, Salomon gained prestige and wealth while working for the cause of the new free government. He endorsed the new bank which was established after the war. Although individuals tried to undermine the work of the "Jew Brokers", Salomon was undaunted by his attackers. The war for independence had been significantly assisted by the "Jew broker" Haym Salomon.

With the conclusion of the War, the nation had undergone a radical transformation. A new nation had been born, new freedoms had been won, and new problems now confronted the nation. The Jewish community was equally affected by the American Revolution. From a hundred Jewish families in 1765, the Jewish community had more than doubled by Cornwallis' surrender.[30] Now the Jews in Philadelphia directed their efforts

to establish a permanent Jewish synagogue.

On March 17, 1782, a document records that Barnard Gratz, Hayman Levy, Jonas Phillips, Benjamin Séixas and Simon Nathan had officially formed themselves into "a congregation to be known and distinguished by the name of Mikveh Israel in the city of Philadelphia".[31] Barnard Gratz and Solomon Myers Cohen were authorized to secure a proper site for a synagogue. The plot they chose on Sterling Alley was located next to a German Reformed church, whose members protested having a synagogue next door. After some time the young synagogue committee secured the necessary additional funds to move the site "on north side of Cherry Street, about midway in the block from Third Street to Sterling Alley, around the corner from the German Reformed Church which had been so unfriendly, half a block from the Zion Lutheran Church at the corner of Fourth and Cherry, only a square from the first Methodist Church established in America at the corner of Third and Vine, and just as near to the Friends' Arch Street Meeting, the first synagogue building in Philadelphia began to rise".[32]

The new congregation still lacked a formal organization. Isaac Moses presided at the meeting held on March 24, 1782, to hear the report of the committee on the synagogue site. But before that matter was discussed, Moses counseled that the members should consider establishing rules, which would be binding on the members. Moses suggested that the members choose permanent offices and that they agree to the following:

> "One to the other then we will assist if required, to form a constitution, and rules for the good government of the Congregation, and strictly abide by the same."33

Moses and the other officers resigned; Isaac Da Costa took over as chairman pro-tem. The decision was made that the congregation should elect a parnas and five adjuntas. The congregation also lacked any formal rules governing the application of new members. Two treasurers were added: Solomon Myers Cohen became an official for tsedeka, Simon Nathan took charge of the building funds.[34]

The details now attended to, the ceremonies to lay the cornerstone took place on June 19, 1782. The inside of the synagogue was built according to traditional customs. Off the east wall was the ark, facing it was the reader's table, and the hazan led services with the congregation surrounding him on either side. The women were in a balcony.[35] The necessary accoutrements for the synagogue were secured either as loans or gifts. The dedication took place on September 13, 1782, with the procession moving from Cauffman's house to the new building. Hayman Salomon, the largest contributor to the synagogue walked at the head of the procession.[36]

Now that the formal organization was established, the Jewish community needed to resolve a number of problems involving religious matters. For example, the Sabbath observance became a synagogal function. The synagogue determined not only the rules governing its members, but the fines imposed upon the members who did not abide by the synagogue's rules.[37] In addition to Sabbath observances, marriage laws were also regulated by the congregation. In a few instances, marriages between divorced partners could not be sanctioned by the congregation. Many of the decisions needed rabbinic authority. Yet, there were no men in America in the eighteenth century who possessed rabbinic knowledge, nor were there any ordained rabbis available.[38]

Mikveh Israel was having serious financial difficulties during this time. However, the congregation attempted to make whatever contribution possible for the relief of the poor. By 1783, a special fund, the Society for Destitute Strangers, was established as a special organization apart from the tsedaka fund of the congregation. This fund attempted to aid traveling persons who found themselves with insufficient money.[39] Contributions came from other parts of the country besides Philadelphia. The divisions between the tsedaka fund and the new organization were hardly differentiated in their records. Mikveh Israel had a reputation for being a wealthy congregation, yet in reality, the congregation ran into financial difficulties. Jonas Phillips and others had signed bonds on behalf of the congregation for the purchase of the synagogue lot. When the bonds fell due, Phillips became personally responsible for the payment of the bonds. He turned to the congregation for assistance in making the bonds good, since the indebtedness had been specifically on behalf of the congregation. The situation of the congregation was so desperate that Phillips was almost taken to jail by the sheriff. The congregation did settle the matter with Phillips, although after some delay.[40]

The minutes of Mikveh Israel reveal that the congregation was young, struggling, and financially unstable. Yet, squabble as they did, the members were determined to provide for the religious needs of the members.[41] Matzos were provided even then.[42] Although the trying financial situations were still unchanged, a petition circulated among the congregation for providing a mikvah. Such was first mentioned in 1782. The matter was quickly resolved. By 1786 a mikvah was completed on the synagogue lot, with every married man agreeing to use "the most persuasive and other

means, to induce his wife to a strict compliance with that duty so incumbent upon them".[43]

One other important religious function needed attention: the education of the children. Thus, in addition to a mikvah, a Hebrew school was constructed behind the synagogue. Little information is available relating to Jewish education. Yet, there is evidence that the native Philadelphian received sufficient raining in the language skills to wear his prayerbook into tatters.[44] Serious instruction was sought through private tutors.

The records of Mikveh Israel between September 4, 1785 and June 28, 1789 have been lost.[45] The congregation was still suffering under financial burdens. Evidence shows that on April 6, 1790, an act was passed permitting a lottery to be held to raise 800 pounds to alleviate the congregation from their financial confines. Thus, on October 19, 1790, the turning of a wheel ended an era of financial crises for Mikveh Israel.[46] The congregation continued to function even during the trying times.

The nineteenth century marked a new era for Mikveh Israel. The financial burdens of the congregation were alleviated; the survival of the congregation was now a certainty. During the succeeding years the prestige of Mikveh Israel grew. Jews were very prominent in the contemporary scene during the nineteenth century. Mikveh Israel had been founded as "Kahal Kadosh", a holy community. The congregation was responsible not only for providing for the needs of the members, but also for enforcing the authority of the synagogue upon the members, by withholding certain rights and privileges. In actuality, the congregation could not enforce its authority; they could only withhold religious

rights from the recalcitrant or the indifferent.[47] The attendance at synagogue, sabbath enfringements, intermarriage were all problems for the Jewish community.

By 1795, there were enough Jews in Philadelphia to form another congregation, Rodeph Shalom, following the Ashkenazic minhag. Philadelphia became the first city to have an Ashkenazic synagogue; the first to have two synagogues in the community; and the first to have a new synagogue formed without great rivalry.[48] Mikveh Israel was still the prestigious congregation; Rodeph Shalom was the struggling congregation. Yet, the two congregations were divided over matters of Jewish education, cemetery maintenance, philantropy, and the growing influence of Christian missionaries.[49]

Mikveh Israel was a Sephardic congregation. Yet the Sephardic membership was not in the majority. The Sephardic contribution lay in the tradition of the organization, of the rules, form of prayer, and the method of keeping the detailed records, receipts, vital statistics, and correspondence over the years since its inception.[50] These standards were introduced by Gershom Mendes Seixas who brought to Philadelphia his experiences from Shearith Israel in New York and their continuation was guaranteed by his successor, Jacob Raphael Cohen. The institution of the congregation provided that "the records be kept in a professional style".[51]

The Jewish community faced problems both from within and without. Intermarriage was a source of friction. Providing for the religious needs of the Jewish community was also trying at times. There was also a serious threat to the Jewish community from the missionary work carried out by the Christians.[52]

During the nineteenth century the position of hazan changed hands a number of times. After Seixas left Philadelphia to return to New York, Rev. Jacob Raphael Cohen took over the vacancy, filling the position until his death in 1811.[53] After Jacob Cohen's death, his son acted as reader until a successor could be found. On October 29, 1815, Rev. Emanuel Nunes Carvalho became the hazan serving in that capacity until his death in 1817.[54] During the succeeding years after Carvalho's death, the position of hazan was occupied by a number of men: Harting Cohen, Jacob Bensadon and Abraham Israel Keys. Keys was elected to the position in 1824, serving until his death in 1828.[55] The problem of securing a hazan was due to the meagre salary offered and not to the lack of qualified readers willing to serve the congregation.[56]

By the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, the increased size of Mikveh Israel, and the members' new economic, social and communal status was reflected in their desire for a new synagogue to befit their pride as well as their needs. The old synagogue was in need of repairs. Since contributions could be deducted from the price of seats, the campaign drive was quick to raise money, although the drive fell short of its goal. By 1822, the architect's plans were approved; the cornerstone was laid on September 26, 1822. A transformation had occurred to Mikveh Israel. Now she had a new synagogue, a new hazan and increasing membership, and no debts. Her years ahead looked bright. With Key's death in 1828, a new hazan was sought.

Philadelphia during the eighteenth century became an important city in political, economic and social circles. It was the seat of government, the only available port during the war, and boasted a prestigious citizenry. Mikveh Israel had undergone a period of struggle and of

growth. Her prestige grew during the nineteenth century. During the last decades of the eighteenth century Philadelphia became the richest city in the United States. Philadelphia became a financial hub in which Jews found comfort.

Our purposes would not be served if we dealt at length with the individuals who contributed to the economic prosperity of Philadelphia. Yet, it is important to understand something about the economic transformation that took place during the early years of Mikveh Israel's existence. Jews were active in many phases of merchant life. There are records showing that Jews, Moses Cohen for one, were active in the brokerage business.[57] The Jews of Philadelphia were responsible to a great measure for the organization of brokerage Houses. Others followed Moses Cohen in the brokerage business. Benjamin Noves and Isaac Franks both opened up their own offices.[58] With the funding bill of 1785, there were many who advocated its support while others rejected it entirely, refusing to accept the new money except at discount.[59] Speculation resulted from this monetary change, causing chaos instead of stability. During the period of this financial crisis most Jews managed to stay solvent, yet Mikveh Israel's financial debacle occurred at the same time. Some members of the congregation experienced bankruptcy, although recovery was the rule. The Jews did maintain an excellent standing in the community. With the increased expansion of the United States, Jews took the opportunity to sell some of their land interests. Many families found themselves with land, but no cash.

Before the end of the eighteenth century, the Jews had made a significant contribution to Philadelphia's commerce. They had sold their goods, or offered their services in competition with non-Jews. The Jews

were established members of the community. Generally, the Jews were more prone to petty trade and shopkeeping rather than craftsmanship and mechanics. The reasons for this were practical. In Europe, the Jews had been limited in the occupations available to them. Handicraft trades and small business were the only occupations possible. Furthermore, learning a trade was impossible for religious reasons. Learning a trade required being apprenticed for many years. This involved living with another family for a period of time. Such would mean sacrificing the laws of Kashruth and the observance of the Sabbath.[60] Many of the early immigrants to America who were skilled in a craft soon became merchants which was a more lucrative occupation.

As the years progressed, many of the Jews of Philadelphia turned some of their attention to the conditions of other Jews. From the very beginning of Mikveh Israel, a fund had been established to care for the needs of the indigent. Philanthropic organizations blossomed during the nineteenth century, as the size and needs of the Jewish community increased and as the influx of immigrants arrived in America.

The earliest Jews arriving in New Amsterdam were permitted to stay provided that they would not become public charges. A tsedaka fund would provide for all the neccessities of their co-religionists.[61] As early as 1783, a special synagogue fund, Ezrath Orechim had seen to the welfare of immigrants and transients. The first Jewish mutual aid society was actually a burial society, established to care for the financial and religious needs of the deceased's family.[62] By 1813, the Society for the Visitation of the Sick and Mutual Assistance was the first extra-synagogal Jewish organization.[63] Many organizations were initiated by the Quakers, who opened poor houses for the sick, insane, and poor.[64]

During the nineteenth century, there was an increased concern for bettering society. The outlet for this desire was channeled into new organizations for philanthropic work. Many of these organizations were sectarian groups; others were strongly evangelical. The Female Hospitable Society for the Relief and the Employment of the Poor instructed its committee members to "administer spiritual as well as temporal relief", and "use every prudent means to bring back lost sheep to the fold of Christ".[65] When religious interests were not the primary purpose of the organization, Jews came forward to assist in the work. Jewish women were very active in sectarian work. Rebecca Gratz was very active in many non-sectarian organizations. The Orphan Society was founded under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church, yet the administration and functioning of the organization was non-sectarian. Rebecca Gratz was a board member for many years.[66]

After the War of 1812, the number of poor in Philadelphia had increased. There were numerous private charities in existence at this time. Many of the charities only alleviated a families' discomfort for a few hours of a day. The Female Hebrew Benevolent Society was the first separate organization founded by the Jews of Philadelphia to administer to the needs of the total Jewish community. The Society became so organized that the city was divided into districts.[67]

There were other organizations founded during the nineteenth century to administer to the needs of the poor. But these organizations brought Jews of Philadelphia together in a non-competitive spirit. No parallel exists today. Then the problems of the poor were aided by the total co-operation of the Jewish community. But this spirit extended also to intra-city co-operation, and even to inter-communal aid. Money was sent

to support the building funds of other cities in America. Money was also sent to Palestine. During this time the total needs of Jews throughout the world were considered. It made no difference whether a Jew was in another city or out of the country, as long as his need was sincere. Mikveh Israel aided everyone possible; however, their position was so desperate in 1825, that a letter was sent to Jerusalem, apologizing for their exhausted treasury.

The Jews of Philadelphia had established two congregations, One was a struggling German congregation, Rodeph Shalom; the other was a well established secure, prestigious congregation, Mikveh Israel. Mikveh Israel had experienced a few decades of financial difficulty but during the 1830's their future looked bright. Philadelphia had become since the Revolution, the most important city in America. It was the home of many political, economic and social functions. Many of the Jews of Philadelphia belonged to prominent families, engaged in lucrative businesses. Jewish tradition had taught that the needs of the poor also needed attention. Societies to alleviate poverty were established. Mutual co-operation was the rule. The city had grown, the congregation was influential; and the 1830's was the beginning of a new era in Philadelphia. The era of Isaac Leeser.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER III

THE LIFE AND ACTIVITIES OF ISAAC LEESER.

Many great men were prominent during the nineteenth century. Some were known for their military skills, others for their political prowess, some were even remembered for their religious activity. Isaac Leeser, for his part, achieved prominence by his impact upon adults and children, upon the rich and poor, upon Jews and Christians.

Isaac Leeser was a staunch champion of traditional Judaism in America during the nineteenth century. Leeser became the spokesman for all those who adhered to traditional Judaism. Although dogmatic with respect to Jewish customs, law and tradition, Isaac Leeser attempted to bring greater decorum and beauty into the religious services. While a strict traditionalist in all matters of religion, he comprehended the new needs of Jewish pioneers in America. He fought for a better educational system, wrote pamphlets, articles, and books for the children, helped to found the first Jewish Publication Society in America, established the first Jewish college, and made changes in the religious service by introducing sermons into the synagogue. Nearly every publication at this time in Jewish religious life bears his name. His translation of the Bible into English remained the standard version in Jewish homes throughout the world until the Jewish Publication Society's translation in 1917.

Isaac Leeser was born in Neuenkirchen, in the province of Westphalia, Prussia on December 12, 1806. His mother's death in his eight year left him in the care of his father and grandmother. His father was a merchant who was a man "of strong, sound sense, of fair education, in comfortable circumstances and sincerely and intelligently pious, without

superstition. He also possessed great bodily strength and powers of endurance.[1] He inspired the young Isaac Leeser to think freely and to implement his thoughts through action. There can be no doubt his father left a permanent impression on him. His grandmother seems to have been an endearing person, for Isaac Leeser recalls her memory with great affection.[2]

During Leeser's early childhood, Napoleon controlled Germany. Under Napoleon, the Jews were permitted temporary equality in those states where the French had influence. Following the decree of 1807, the Jews of Westphalia obtained full emancipation.[3] Jerome Bonaparte became the ruler whose royal decree "placed the Jews, even those who migrated into the Kingdom from other lands on a footing of absolute equality with other subjects."[4]

Israel Jacobsohn, the financial agent to Jerome Bonaparte, realized that cultural emancipation must follow political emancipation. In 1801, he founded a boarding school in Seesen for both Christian and Jewish boys. In these schools the general subjects were taught by Christian teachers while Jewish instructors taught religious matters to Jewish students.[5] In addition, the religious services were reformed. Choral singing of German Hymns, addresses in German, German Prayers and other changes in the mode of worship were initiated by royal decree. All other forms of worship were abolished until the fall of Napoleon.[6]

Jacobsohn founded the first reform temple in Seesen in 1810. Orthodox feelings were in conflict with his reforms. Although Leeser was exposed to the modern reform movement during his earliest years of life, he was not impressed by these developments. Indeed, he recalled them with

displeasure. It would seem as though the seeds of his lifelong opposition to reform were sown in the very soil out of which reform grew. Rabbi Abraham Sutro, the Chief Rabbi of the diocese of Münster and Mark, a staunch opponent of any reform was one of Leeser's teachers, and it is likely that Leeser took him as his ego ideal. If Sutro's Milhamot Adonai is at all revealing of his teaching, Leeser was exposed to a virile anti-reformist indoctrination.[7]

Isaac Leeser had numerous contacts with Christians. Although the political atmosphere existing in the provinces of Germany was unfavorable to Jews, Leeser indicates that the Jewish students mingled freely with Christians. Leeser reveals no prejudice against Christians. "Educated partly in a Catholic college, and having enjoyed, though then but a boy, the kindness and instruction of several clergymen of that religion, it would be strange were he to have any prejudice against it. Its tenets, properly carried out, will make men, no doubt, as good as Protestantism."[8] Leeser was taught for five years in a Catholic school and for two years only by priests.[9]

Leeser attended the gymnasium in Münster for two and a quarter years. His father moved to Münster shortly after his mother died. Heiman Leeser, a minister in Lübeck and an author of a text book on Hebrew grammar, is the only relative associated with some aspect of his education.[10]

Leeser did not have an extensive education. He claimed that his schooling at Münster was equivalent to an A.B. degree in an American university. But time and again he apologized for his meager knowledge. "No one need tell us that we have much to learn in the very things where many might expect us to be better informed than we are."[11] Again he begged of his readers: "It may be presumptuous in one who is, properly speaking,

but little more than a layman, both by position and education, to undertake discussing so grave a theme as the one we have proposed."[12] Isaac Leeser felt very inadequate in talmudic knowledge. "We do not claim any extensive learning; our talmudic knowledge is very little indeed - much less than we ought to possess."[13] Leeser never was ordained a rabbi, nor did he desire the title. Throughout his life he considered himself a teacher and exponent of Judaism. He never earned a doctor's degree, and was satisfied with the title of "Reverend".

Isaac Leeser came to America on the request of his uncle, Zalma Rehine, a merchant, who had become well established in Richmond, Virginia. Leeser left Germany for Richmond, arriving in the United States in May, 1824. Leeser came originally to attend school, but after ten weeks, left school to enter his uncle's employ.[14] Although Leeser's life seemed destined toward commercial pursuits, his real interest lay in study and learning. In a short time he attained full mastery of the English language. Throughout his early days in America, he took a special interest in Jewish education. Leeser even assisted Reverend Isaac B . Seixas in the instruction of the youth on religious matters.[15] Since Zalma Rehine had married into the Seixas family, Isaac Leeser was afforded special opportunities to stimulate further his devotion to Jewish causes.[16] In Richmond, Leeser became acquainted with the Spanish Portuguese rite which he later sought to spread throughout America. Isaac Leeser remained in his uncle's employ for five years. During these years in Richmond, he both mastered English and intensified his love of Judaism.[17] In 1828, he appeared in press. It was in 1829 that "he wrote several essays to rebut the calumnies, which had been spread abroad through an English review against the character of the Jewish faith and people."[18]

Leeser soon gained a reputation as a strong guardian of Judaism. His reputation was quickly brought to the congregation Mikveh Israel, in Philadelphia. Not long thereafter, he was invited to become their reader in 1829.

Leeser wrote about his position in Philadelphia as follows:

> "It was in the early part of the summer of 5589 (1829), that I was invited to become a candidate for the office of Hazan of the congregation Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia. I was at that time only a few months over twenty two years old, and had not thought of ever becoming the minister of any congregation, and was induced solely under the persuasion that being in public life I would become useful to the Jewish community, that I consented to have my name presented among others. At that period the duties of the minister were confined to the conducting of the public worship in the Synagogue and elsewhere, and it was not expected that he should be at the same time a preacher and exhorter. But even before my being in office it had appeared to me as an incongruity, that words of instruction formed no part of our regular service; and having been summoned on account of some literary efforts produced in Richmond to accept the trust with which the voice of a large majority of the Israelites in Philadelphia honored me, I had indulged the hope that I would be requested, immediately after my election, to give discourses on our religion in the language of the country."[19]

Upon the death of the Rev. Abraham Israel Keys in 1828, Mikveh Israel sought a new reader. The congregation of Mikveh Israel was among the most influential in America. Leeser portrayed the Sephardic Jews as the oldest, richest, most intelligent body of Israelites in America. The circumstances leading to Isaac Leeser's election are interesting. At a congregational meeting held on June 28, 1829, the chairman of a committee Raphael de Cordova, who was chosen responsible for accepting candidates to the office reported that "they (the Committee) have received an answer

from Richmond, highly recommending a gentleman by the name of Mr. Leeser".[20] Isaac Leeser, Abraham Ottolengui, E. L. Lazarus and Gomparts Gomparts were considered for the office. Gomapart's services were unacceptable, Ottolengui was then not twenty-one, and Lazarus desired life tenure. Leeser wrote that "instead of an examination into his fitness, by previous study and the due acquirements for the office to which he was called, he was merely required to read the service for three successive weeks; when without further inquiry or examination he was installed into the office".[21]

Leeser felt inadequately prepared for the position. "Knowing my own want of proper qualification, I would never have consented to serve if others more fitting in point of standing, information, or other qualities had been here; but this not being the case, I consented to serve."[22]

Yet, the choice remained between the Rev. Leeser and Rev. Lazarus for final balloting. Rev. Leeser received twenty-six votes, Rev. Lazarus only seven. Rev. Leeser was elected for a period of three years commencing with Rosh Hashanah 5590 (1829), at an annual salary of $800.00.[23] Although Leeser's election to Mikveh Israel radically changed the course of his life, his ministry during the next twenty-one years had in turn a profound effect on Mikveh Israel and the Jews of America.

Isaac Leeser had projected in his mind great plans for the revival of Judaism. He was talented, endowed with great energy and perseverance, and thought by many to be a genius. Leeser was most dissatisfied with the ignorance of his congregants and in the methods then existing for improving their meagre knowledge. Leeser felt that the only means for enlightening his members would be through a system of English discourses delivered at various times during the year.[24] Thus, Isaac Leeser, a

staunch traditionalist in religious worship became the advocate of English discourses to follow the service. This was a radical innovation. His first address was announced for June 2, 1830.

Leeser never officially gained permission to preach. In a comment appended to his first sermon he justifies his course of action.

> "But though I had no power bestowed on me to speak, it was perfectly clear that the people desired pulpit instruction. After being, therefore, nearly nine months in office, I was induced to address acircular letter to the several members of the Board of Adjunta, asking them whether my speaking in Synagogue would meet with their consent. Without holding a formal meeting, a majority of the Board signified, in unofficial letters their approval of my intention. With this permission thus conveyed, I had to be satisfied, and I accordingly prepared myself with the above address which was spoken on Sabbath Nasso, 5590, and was the first original composition I ever delivered in public. It was a painful experiment, the issue of which I greatly dreaded; but the kind approbation and encouragement, bestowed on me by some intelligent ladies, especially after it had been spoken, admonished me that I ought to persevere; and the result had been that while faithfully discharging all the duties proper of the Hazanship, I added public instruction as a part of our service. Since the year noted above, the custom has extended almost everywhere, and no congregation thinks itself thoroughly organized without a preacher; but then speaking in Synagogue was something new and far from being acquiesced in by many even well meaning and pious persons."[25]

Not only did his introduction of the sermon receive the immediate approval of his own congregation, but it was adopted by many congregations throughout the country.

Isaac Leeser's energies at times were staggering. Novel as his new labors were to him, he was unflogging in his literary pursuits. During his first year, 1830, in Philadelphia, he translated Johlson's "Instruction in the Mosaic Religion". In 1833, his defense of Jews

appeared in a book, "The Jews and the Mosaic Law." His energies on behalf of Jews and Judaism seemed to know no bounds.

The strain on his health took its toll in 1834 when Leeser developed a severe attack of smallpox, which interrupted his writings. Rebecca Gratz wrote about Isaac Leeser's condition:

> "There is another evil under the sun that has been making havoc in our city varioloid--poor Mr. Leeser is one of its present subjects, his attack has been unmitigated smallpox and though his life and eyesight have been spared I am told his countenance will bear marks of its ravages. He has always been so sensitive on the subject of personal disadvantages that his former humility will appear like vanity to his present state and unless some Desdemona shall arise to see his visage in his mind, and his future expectations must be confined to solitary studies." 26

His recovery was slow but complete. Yet his illness caused great anguish for him. His brother Jacob, hurried to his bedside, only to contract the disease himself. Jacob Leeser was not as fortunate as his brother. On March 14, 1834, Jacob Leeser succumbed at the youthful age of twenty-five.[27]

In 1836, Rev. G. Poznanski was elected reader and preacher in Charleston, S. C., and subsequent to his assuming office, he introduced reforms in the service which caused Rev. Leeser to object strongly, since he, Leeser, had suggested him for this position. He thus wrote Poznanski:

> "When you were elevated to the office of Hazan to the Portuguese Jewish Congregation of Charleston, called Beth Elohim, I rejoiced that one whom I thought deserving of the elevated position had been chosen by our friends of Charleston; and I think that there are yet in existence sundry letters of recommendation, which, unknown to you, I addressed to several influential gentlemen in that city and elsewhere. I did this under the full persuasion that you were a strict conformist and an orthodox believer, as those terms are understood among us."28

Leeser criticized Poznanski for introducing instumental music into the service, for abolishing the second days of holidays, for his disbelief in a personal Messiah, and in the future restoration of Palestine.[29] Even some years before the battle with Wise, Leeser's attack on reform had already begun and was to become stronger in the succeeding years.

Sometime after recovering from his illness, Leeser wrote a two-volume compilation of his sermons in 1837. In the same year, he issued a ritual according to the Portuguese rites. Although Leeser was born into the German ritual, he was a strong advocate of the Sephardic ritual for all congregations in America.

> "We are free to confess to those of our readers who belong to the German and Polish rituals, that to our view, the Portuguese form is better adapted to the Israelites in America, owing to its greater simplicity and absence of the long poetical prayers, than the other two, and that, could our advice avail, we would honestly counsel every new congregation to adopt from choice the prayer book of the Sephardim."[30]

In the following year, his Spelling Book was issued. In 1839, his Catechism was published, followed two years later by another volume of his Discourses. In that same year, 1841, Leeser issued a series of articles written two years previously in which he again came to the defense of his people. These articles first appeared in the Philadelphia Gazette in 1839 and 1840.[31] Also in 1841, Leeser edited Miss Aguilar's Spirit of Judaism.

Isaac Leeser was interested in all Jewish causes. In 1841, Leeser was the first to urge Union between the Portuguese, German and Polish congregation.[32] At the suggestion of Rabbi Levis Solomon of Philadelphia, Leeser joined a meeting whose purpose was the union of all Jews in America. Leeser stated the purpose of the meeting in an editorial, published in the

Occident.

> "It was with such a view, to promote peace through union, and a greater religious conformity through the powerful agency of public opinion, that we joined, now four years ago, 33 in a movement, which was projected in this city, to promote, first, the union of all American Israelites under a common Ecclesiastical Council, which should have the supervision of the spiritual affairs of our various congregations; secondly, the establishment of schools; and thirdly, periodical assemblies of all American congregations." 34

On April 18, 1843, Leeser's magazine, The Occident and American Jewish Advocate appeared in public. This magazine was published for twenty-five consecutive years under the sole editorship of Isaac Leeser. His magazine's motto capsulized its goals: "To learn and to teach, to observe and to do." Quickly the magazine became the defender of all Jews, of Judaism, and of all Jewish causes. Leeser adopted a fearless editorial policy, yet permitted his opponents an opportunity to propose other alternatives. He was sharp with his attacks; still his magazine had a very dignified standing among Jews and non-Jews. For a time his magazine was the only Jewish news organ in America. Besides a monthly edition, Leeser included contributions from others whether in Europe or America. He himself translated many of the articles from Hebrew or German into English. In addition, Leeser's magazine served as an important record of congregational and communal activities. Thus, it becomes indispensible as a source for the Jewish history of these twenty-five years. Leeser was indeed very proud that although other magazines appeared for brief periods whose editions "have all more extensive learning than the editor of this unpresuming magazine can lay claim to",[35] his magazine had been in existence the longest. The changing events in Ameri-

can Jewish life are preserved in the pages of the Occident.

Leeser's temperament emerges within the pages of the Occident. Leeser was a gentleman, and in all controversy, he refrained from any personal attacks upon his adversaries. He stated that his "Opponents must be so treated as though they one day might become friends and supporters".[36] Leeser promised that in all controversy "to treat them all with courtesy, and conduct any controversy with them in a gentlemanly tone; and we trust to be treated by them in a similar manner".[37] In proposing guidelines for all editors to follow, Leeser suggested that at no time should we "treat our opponents in such a manner that reconciliation must become impossible".[38] While he guarded himself against inappropriate treatment of his opponents, he delivered his sharpest attacks against those advocating principles opposed to his own.

Yet, while he was critical of his opponents and their principles, Leeser was not loath to salute his opponents' abilities. "Of the talents and learning of Doctors Wise and Lilienthal, I have always entertained a high opinion: I do this now, and I say it freely, little as they may value my praise and censure."[39] Leeser praised his most ardent opponent by calling him "this gifted son of Israel"[40] and "the learned rabbi of Albany".[41] Even during the final years of battle, Leeser continued to direct his opposition against the issues and not against the personalities. Only with rare exceptions does Leeser attack an individual harshly.[42]

Leeser's Occident may have brought him distinction, but his finest achievement was the translation of the Bible into English. In 1845, he completed a five-volume translation of the Pentateuch, followed in 1853 by a complete translation of the Bible in one volume. Although other translations existed at the time, Leeser's Bible became the recognized

version until 1917. Since he was not a scholar, Leeser's achievement stands out all the more. Those who had not heard Leeser's name through the publication of the Occident, came to know of him through his translation of the Bible.

In 1850, Isaac Leeser met with some difficulties within his congregation. Leeser wrote an article in the Occident which drew for him a censure from his congregation of Mikveh Israel even though he was granted no hearing. Leeser wrote about his position openly in the Occident "In an article headed Philadelphia, in the Occident for last November, I gave a mere sketch of my residence in this place, and told the reader that twice I was forced by uncontrollable circumstances to sign a penalty contract."[43] As a result of Leeser's protest in the Occident, he was censured by the congregation.

> "I have been abundantly censured by public voice and private conversation, independently of the acts of the Kahal and Adjunta for my impudence; but if it were the last thing I should write, I cannot say that I regret the step I took, since something was necessary to be done to bring the subject clearly before the people." 44

During this period of difficulty, Leeser found himself unable to preach.

> "I never spoke again after the 24th of March, 1850, because I could not stand up to teach a people who had fixed a stain upon my name to the extent this was in their power to do, by any vote they would pass." 45

Isaac Leeser remained in his office until the twenty-seventh of September, 1850.

> "I retired after filling the office of Hazan for a period of twenty-one years and six weeks. My health had been so greatly undermined by constant excitement to which I was subjected, that it was a source of joy when I could say that the last day of my official term had come." 46

Isaac Leeser had completed a very distinguished career at Mikveh Israel. He had neither sought the position, nor did he resign. Although his days of usefulness had ended at Mikveh Israel, he soon was called upon to serve Beth El Emeth of Philadelphia in 1857; a position he held until a throat ailment forced him to relinquish his ministerial duties.[47]

His energy was not diminshed by the anguish he suffered at Mikveh Israel. In fact his zeal and ardor seemed to have been stimulated after leaving public office. In 1850, he translated from the Hebrew, a technical book by Rabbi Joseph Schwartz entitled, Descriptive Geography of Palestine. Although unfamiliar with geographical science, and lacking proficiency in Modern Hebrew, Leeser was not deterred from undertaking this task. On the contrary, Leeser felt that the need for such works was so great that a sense of urgency drove him to fulfill the task.

The conflict between him and Mikveh Israel was finally resolved by a resolution passed on April 30, 1854. "Resolved that the resolution passed on the 24th of March, 1850, approving the action of the Board of Managers in passing a vote of censure of the Rev. I. Leeser, on the 21st of October, 1849, for certain remarks in the October number of the Occident be repealed."[48] The grievances were finally put aside; the matter had been rectified.

In 1859, Leeser published Dias' Letters which was a strong work in favor of Judaism. In the following year, he republished "The Inquisition and Judaism." In 1864, he published Meditations and Prayers by Mrs. Hester Rothchild with his own notes and revisions and in the same year Miss Aguilar's Jewish Faith and Spirit of Judaism. Finally, in 1867 his ten-volume Discourses were issued.[49]

In the fall of 1866, Leeser suffered from a severe throat condition which impaired his service to the congregation. He was counseled by a physician to spend the winter in a more temperate climate. The services of Mr. Abraham Pereira were obtained for a period of three months to permit Leeser an opportunity to recover fully.[50] Although still in ill health, Leeser was not deterred from his writing during this time. In November 1867, his physician discovered an internal tumor which forced him to bed. The tumor increased in size so rapidly that Leeser realized that this was a fatal illniess. Leeser calmly recited the confession for the dying, dictated his will and gave specific instructions for the disposition of his estate and personal effects. Leeser had two fervent desires: one, that his work be perpetuated, the other that the Occident be continued. Leeser was relieved when he learned that every effort would be exerted to carry out his wishes. His health improved sufficiently in January, 1868, for Leeser to write several articles for the Occident, but by the middle of the month, his condition gradually declined, until on Saturday morning, February 1st, Leeser succumbed peacefully.[51]

Isaac Leeser's imprint upon American Jewish life was permanent. During his life, he fought gallantly to strengthen Judaism. Two issues occupied him until his death: a constant striving for improved education for young and old alike, and his equally constant but losing battle with Reform Judaism.

In the matter of religious education, Isaac Leeser considered the ignorance of Judaism a major problem of Jews in his day. Leeser was keenly aware of the need for the masses and the young to benefit from an adequate religious education. Through the pages of the Occident Leeser instructed his readers through sermons and discourses, and pleaded with

them in his sermons to establish a better system of education. Men had to be reared for the ministry; teachers had to be guided in the proper principles. Leeser felt that reform would not have advanced so rapidly had the principles and character of Judaism been better comprehended by more Jews. Besides a sufficient number of ministers and teachers to preach and teach Judaism, there was an urgent cry for proper books on Jewish topics. Thus Leeser drove himself beyond normal limits to fill the existing void. He desperately fought for the establishment of a Jewish Publication Society, an association preceding the present one by nearly forty years. In all matters pertaining to education, Leeser summoned all his strength. He wrote on Jewish topics incessantly, preached to his congregation weekly, published the Occident monthly and lectured on affairs regularly. Leeser fervently prayed that Judaism would be improved by his efforts. He made his mark on American Jewry.

At the same time that Isaac Leeser strongly supported all efforts on behalf of education, he bitterly opposed all aspects of Reform. Early in this ministry, Leeser fought for union among all Jews. He supported Isaac M. Wise's call for union until Leeser discovered that reform customs were being substituted for the old traditional doctrines. To counteract Wise's growing strength, Leeser called for a union of all orthodox rabbis, but met with little success. Leeser even hoped that both factions could meet together to effect a united American Jewry. But his dreams never materialized. Reform continued to gain strength. Toward the end of his years, Leeser realized the tide had changed in favor of Reform.

While Leeser was engaged with these two issues throughout his ministry, he also found sufficient time to support social reforms. He success-

fully urged the organization of charities, orphan homes and asylums. Weeks seldom passed without his giving attention to the conditions of Jews in America or in other parts of the world. He often spoke out for relief of Jews in Palestine. His effort on behalf of all Jews reached to all parts of the world.

What kind of person was Isaac Leeser?

> "The mental constitution of Mr. Leeser was gigantic. His memory was wonderful. He seemed never to forget the countenance or the name of a man whom he had once seen. His comprehension was lightening-like. He could perceive in an instant the point of the most abstruse discussion or question, and his eminently logical mind at once followed it out to all its conclusions. Frequently his views met with opposition from the fact that they were too far-seeing and comprehensive." 52

Leeser had become proficient in Hebrew grammar and although not a scholar in Talmudic law, his knowledge was quite substantial. He yielded on matters of Talmudic law to the educated rabbis, yet this could be due to his unwillingness to discuss subjects, in which he was not totally competent. Although not an expert in Talmud, he was versed in the Mishnah. Leeser never studied Gemara, yet he was more learned than people who had studied for many years. His knowledge of most subjects was encyclopediac.[53]

Leeser was able to write on almost any subject at length. He thought logically and never burdened his readers with platitudes or long quotations. Leeser presented himself as one not fully schooled which he frequently reiterated, yet he was truly knowledgeable in numerous facets of Jewish and secular learning.[54]

Isaac leeser was modest, humble, even meek. During his life he never sought financial gain from his ministry. At times, he lamented that

his magazine had barely earned enough to pay all expenses, whereas if all the subscribers had paid their debt to him, Leeser could have earned a decent living. Leeser was not a business man. On the contrary, he was timid in such matters. When new subscribers desired to receive his magazine, he sent the new copy to the family, assuming that they would automatically pay for the subscript. Numerous times he pleaded with them to realize their debt to him. Yet, year after year he lived on a modest salary.

Leeser expressed feelings of inferiority. Although Leeser never earned a doctorate, his learning was equal to the degree. Isaac Leeser still felt that he was not equal to other rabbis who were ordained or who had attained the title of "Doctor". All through his life, Leeser reminds his readers that he is not a rabbi, but only elected to the position of hazan.

Leeser does not seem to have enjoyed a happy life. He writes about his career:

> "However others may have found pleasure and profit in their editorial career, I have found neither; but, from the beginning till now, it has caused me sorrow and care, disappointment and vexation."55

Leeser laments upon his numerous disappointments and upon the loneliness of his cause:

> "I have battled with difficulties which few would attempt to oppose; I have met with unkindness where I had hoped for friendship; I have encountered indifference where I had reason to expect the most active sympathy; and I have been shocked to be received with aversion where I had imagined that I had secured friends even unto death." 56

As Reform's strength seemed to overshadow Leeser's orthodox principles, he became increasingly more unhappy about his life's work. Everything

seemed to have been done in vain. For this reason, Leeser was relieved before his death to learn that every effort would be made to continue his work.

Isaac Leeser spent most of his life in Philadelphia, a city of great wealth and influence. Philadelphia was the hub of nineteenth century life. Within this city, Leeser remained throughout his ministry. As an influential member of the community, Leeser came daily into contact with the elite of Philadelphia. Naturally, Leeser expressed some of their sentiments although he was neither wealthy nor from a prominent social family. He remained a bachelor throughout his life. Yet, Isaac Leeser viewed Philadelphia as the cultural center of America; and the other cities in the West as provincial. There existed within him a tension between the actual meager, lonely life he led, and the social prominence and wealth of the financially bustling community of Philadelphia. On the one hand, Leeser was not a member of the elite nor socially prominent, yet he influenced the lives of people on all social levels. He chastized them for their meager donations, their ill-treatment of him. He was at home in the city, and frequently was called upon to head various charities. Although he never expressed his opinion of the cities in the West, one cannot escape the feeling that Leeser considered them uneducated newcomers by comparison with Jewish citizens of Philadelphia. Leeser may scold some of his congregants for their actions, yet he was respected as part of the prominent elite to the end of his days.

FOOTNOTES

1 Isaac Leeser, Ed., The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, (Philadelphia) Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. p. 593.

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

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7 Isaac Leeser, Discourses on the Jewish Religion, (Sherman and Co., Philadelphia, 1867.) Vol. I, preface.

8 Occident, Vol. XVI, No. 10; January, 1859. p. 485.

9 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 10; January, 1845. p. 463.

10 Ibid., Vol. XXII, No. 5; August, 1864. p. 233.

11 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 3; June, 1843. p. 109.

12 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 6; September, 1850. p. 265.

13 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 3; June, 1845. p. 146.

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15 Ibid.

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18 Occident, Vol. X, No. 1; April, 1852. p. 23.

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22 Mayer Sulzberger, "Isaac Leeser" in The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. VII; Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1901. p. 663.

23 Henry Samuel Morais, op. cit,, p. 46.

24 Occident, Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. p. 595.

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26 David Philipson, Ed., Letters of Rebecca Gratz, (The Jewish Publication Society; Philadelphia, 1929.) p. 193.

27 Occident, Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. p. 595.

28 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 5; August, 1843. p. 254.

29 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 5; August, 1843. pp. 253-261.

30 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 9; December, 1844. p. 411.

31 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. p. 595.

32 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 10; January, 1845. p. 457.

33 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 4; July, 1845. p. 174.

34 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 4; July, 1845. pp. 174-175.

35 Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 1; April, 1848. p. 3.

36 Ibid., Vol. XVI, No. 1; April, 1858. p. 4.

37 Ibid., Vol. XV, No. 1; April, 1857. p. 10.

38 Ibid., Vol. XV, No. 1; April, 1857, p. 3.

39 Ibid., Vol. XIV, No. 7; October, 1856. p. 353.

40 Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 9; December, 1848. p. 435.

41 Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 7; October, 1848. p. 321.

42 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 3; June, 1854. pp. 148-153.

43 Ibid., Vol. IX, No. 2; May, 1851. p. 106.

44 Ibid., Vol. IX, No. 2; May, 1851, p. 110.

45 Ibid., Vol. XVI, No. 1; April, 1858. pp. 48-49.

46 Ibid., Vol. XVI, No. 1; April, 1858. p. 47.

47 Ibid., Vol. XXIV, No. 8; November, 1866. p. 381.

48 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 3; June, 1854. p. 164.

49 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. p. 596.

50 Ibid., Vol. XXIV, No. 7; October, 1866. p. 381.

51 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. pp. 598-599.

52 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 12; March, 1868. p. 599.

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CHAPTER IV

"EDUCATE! THIS IS THE REMEDY."

Isaac Leeser accepted the call to Mikveh Israel in 1829. Leeser soon realized that only through a proper system of Jewish education could Judaism survive. But Leeser found the American system of education different from the educational system abroad. The great change in America was the new system of universal public education. Public education for all, created problems for the Jewish community. Previously, Jewish education was exclusively determined by the Jewish community which was responsible for the training of Jewish children in all aspects of faith and culture. With universal public education, the responsibility for the education of children was placed under the control of the State. Religious education was relegated to the home. Various religious groups, realizing the great need, attempted to fill the void. Jews supported this new system of education since they felt that democracy would be furthered by this system. Yet, while the Jewish community in America was faced with the problem of religious education for its children, there were no previous experiences for them to draw upon to resolve the situation.[1]

Leeser knew that whenever public school systems were not in existence, Jewish children were educated in Christian schools. Leeser pointed out the dangers of this situation:

> "Besides all this, we are in a great error if we suppose that Christian teachers do not endeavor to influence actively the sentiments of their Jewish pupils; there are some, at least who take expecial pains to warp the mind and to implant the peculiar tenets of Christianity clandestinely, instead of attending to the development of the intellect, by a classical and scientific cause of instruction." [2]

Leeser presumed that Christian teachers would take every opportunity to convert their Jewish students. Thus, Leeser felt there was a great danger for Jewish students who could not answer the arguments presented to them. "If even open apostasy does not follow, there is unfortunately a divided hart, not very favorable to the growth of healthful religion." [3]

Where no other opportunities for education of the Jewish children existed, Leeser suggested the Christian schools be carefully watched for any attempts at converting Jews.

> "Let the parents watch closely over the progress of their children, and the course of conduct pursued towards them by their Christian teachers; they must not suffer, on any account, that the young Israelites should be instructed in matters of religion belonging to another creed, and, if possible, require that they be allowed to be absent when prayers are recited in which a mediator is invoked. Further, the teachers should on no account be permitted to speak disrespectfully of Jews and their faith; since they are not engaged for the purpose of teaching doctrinal matters, but the principles of a scientific education." [4]

The rabbis were naturally more in favor of public education than of education placed in the control of Christian schools and teachers. In public schools, children would learn about general subjects important for all children; religion would have no place here. The reasons for opposition were clear. Each religion feared that the principles of its religion would be lost under this system. For the Jews, public education was the best solution. At first, the Jews supported Jewish all-day schools until the public schools became completely secular in character. Leeser proposed a solution:

> "What is the remedy? Diffusion of religious knowledge in the full sense of the words; it would be best to establish Jewish elementary

> schools in every district where there are sufficient children to occupy the time of a teacher, who should be both religiously and scientifically qualified to instruct his charges in the way they ought to walk, and in things it behooves them to know." 5

Between 1840 and 1855, two types of institutions were developed to better educate Jewish children: orphanages were formed by congregations for the benefit of middle and lower class families, while boarding schools were established for the wealthy families. In 1851, Isaac Leeser was instrumental in the formation of the Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia, an example of the type. A number of children from congregations in the city were enrolled in the school. Leeser comments in an address given at the dedication of a schoolhouse about the Society:

> "For see, go where you will now, in Boston, New York, Albany, Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Louisville, St. Louis, New Orleans, Savannah, Montreal, and even San Francisco, where Jews a few years ago were unknown, efforts have been made or are making at this moment to import religious instruction, either separately at stated times, or daily in connection with the usual elementary branches, in the manner we are doing; thus proving that Israelites have at length been awakened to the paramount necessity devolving on them to rescue our young members from the curse of indifference which rests like a deadly pall on the sick spirit of so many who are of Israel."6

Children from the Jewish Foster Home in Philadelphia later were enrolled in the Hebrew Education Society. Leeser expressed his concern for poor Jewish children in the pages of the Occident:

> "We know well enough that there are other objects equally deserving the attention of American Israelites; but we believe there are means enough, if the wealthy only would think so, to endow a foster home, a hospital, and a college, besides leaving ample means for the accomplishment of all other good schemes."7

The other type, the boarding school, was the work of Dr. Max Lilenthal. Lilienthal ran a private school with a traditional Jewish spirit which gained prominence among both rabbis and the community. Leeser praised the school and publicized the achievements of the school.[8] Misses Palaché ran a boarding school which Leeser called to the attention of his readers.

> "We are pleased, nay more, delighted, that Jewish parents in America have an opportunity thus offered them of placing their children under the charge of two accomplished ladies of our own persuasion, in whose house, not alone their mental and moral culture will be cared for, but where also that essential, that breath of life of the Hebrew's existence, his own religion, will be imparted, and enforced by a pious example; and in saying this we say only what is strictly true, and we hazard little in asserting that our friends will not be disappointed in encouraging the establishment of Misses Palaché."[9]

B'nai Jeshurun of New York established an institute under the leadership of Dr. Morris Raphall in 1852. The school was organized to educate both sexes in Hebrew, English, and the classics. The real aim was to make Judaism "familiar to their children, like household words".[10] The students studied in their own building, the first built by Jews in America. The B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute was a source of great pride for the congregation, yet the whole program collapsed in 1858, due to the lack of public support. The main reason was the increasing popularity of the public school system. The general feeling was that denominational education hindered the social integration of divergent groups within a city. All people were now free to choose from the bounties of American life. When Jews established congregational, boarding and private schools, the Jews were separating themselves from the main-

streams of the community, and especially, from the very equality of education they all had fought so hard to attain in this country. Most Jews sought for a supplementary system to educate the Jewish children in their faith. If the children were going to receive a proper education in public school, new mechanisms needed to be advanced to transmit the religious heritage to the Jewish children.[11]

The answer was patterned after the solution of the Christian community. Sunday, the only day children were free from public school, seemed the day most suitable for the religious training of the children. Thus, the Sunday school system of religious education was born. Both the rich and the poor benefited from this education. Rebecca Gratz was the founder of the first Jewish Sunday school in America. With the encouragement of Isaac Leeser who helped to publicize the school, a network of other such schools appeared in other cities.

> "Our sisters of New York and Charleston, hearing of the success that has attended our attempt and sensible that much good must result from early lessons of piety, have determined to establish similar institutions in their respective cities."[12]

Leeser reports his own pleasure with the Sunday school system which has taken the place of full-day education. Leeser writes about the annual report:

> "It presents a pleasing view in a few words of the progress of this good institution which, in the absence of regular day-schools for the religious education of Israelites, contributes, in an eminent degree, to disseminate much valuable and healthful instruction among a large number of children taken from all classes of our three congregations."[13]

Soon Leeser realized that the Sunday school system could not meet the total educational requirements of the Jewish children. There were

too few hours allotted under the Sunday school system to permit the children to adequately appreciate the heritage of their people. A new solution was now imperative. Leeser, Szold, Jastrow, Morais and others suggested the adoption of a Talmud Torah System to replace the Sunday school. A New York Talmud Torah and Hebrew Institute was established under the leadership of Rev. Samuel Isaacs. "The primary object of the association is to give an elementary English education with a thorough instruction in Hebrew and the religion of Israel."[14] The Talmud Torah in most cases was patterned after the former all-day schools, except that general courses were now taught in the public school. The Talmud Torah students attended after the regular sessions of the public school were over in the day. Usually, the students came twice a week to learn Hebrew, the Bible and the prayerbook. The pupils felt the additional hours of study a burden while the leaders of the schools considered the time inadequate.[15] In actuality, the Talmud Torah was not much better than the Sunday school. The children disliked both systems.

Many other problems existed in the education of Jewish children. Besides the development of the general educational system during the nineteenth century, there were other obstacles which demanded a solution: a lack of teachers, an insufficient supply of suitable books, and no trained minsters. Isaac Leeser addressed himself to these problems with as much devotion and enthsiasm as he displayed in all his endeavors.

Throughout Jewish history, the Jewish child was educated in his faith by his parents or a private tutor. The children learned Hebrew by reading the Siddur, they learned the Bible, Talmud and Commentaries in the course of their training. The children were motivated through a

rigidly structured community. Each family taught its own children from the Bible, Talmud or Siddur that they had in their own home. Since life evolved around these books, they were the best textbooks for the children. Thus, the demand for books for children was an entirely new phenomenon.[16] Why were the old standard Jewish books unsuitable now?

During the nineteenth century, the community structure was destroyed. Jews left the cities and moved throughout the land, taking advantage of their new freedom. The Jewish community lost much of its identity. The children now experienced little family observance, asking numerous questions about Jewish beliefs before learning about the custom or tradition. The religious school was thought to be a solution to the new breakdown in the Jewish religious structure. The children learned Judaism within the framework of American life with English or German textbooks. Thus, there arose a demand for textbooks in English which would bridge the gap between the material learned at home and in religious classes. In this way, the children would be able to relate their faith to the ever-changing American scene.[17] Isaac Leeser confronted this deficiency in education with enormous energy and determination.

The Jews copied the style of religious education from their Christian neighbors. Since Christian schools were utilizing catechisms as their primary form of instruction, the Jewish system decided to produce its own version. Isaac Leeser was the first to publish a Jewish catechism originally from a German source. Leeser translated J. J. Johlson's work, Instruction in the Mosaic Religion which he published in 1830. Since Leeser felt that there were strong Reform sentiments in this work, he published his own catechism, patterned after a Hamburg rabbi, Dr. Klee, in 1839. These catechisms served as introductions to a later study of Hebrew,

Bible, and other Jewish sources. Isaac Leeser, published The Hebrew Reader in 1838. This book became the standard Hebrew textbook for a number of years.

But, as mentioned previously, there were other materials required to fill the existing void in textbooks. In 1844, Leeser estimated that there were only about eight Jewish books in English.

> "Independently of this consideration we were but too conscious that the English-speaking Jews have but very few books of devotion, and that, in truth, the whole number can scarcely be more than eight, so far as known to us. It thus happens, that many families must be entirely without a single volume which they can use for religious reading, or put in the hands of their children as guides to eternal life." 18

Leeser entertained the idea of organizing a society to supply literature on Judaism. The society would be known as the Jewish Publication Society. In early 1845, Leeser proposed a plan for the Society.[19] A committee was formed to assist with the organization and the first publication was subsequently printed very inexpensively.

Leeser thought that the Society would not only bring inexpensive publications before the Jewish public, but also that the books would combat the Christian indoctrination found in nearly every book.

> "Perhaps our Jewish friends may believe that there is no necessity for the publication of books fitted more particularly for the reading of our younger branches. If they think so they are greatly in error. We state it as an uncontrovertible fact, that hardly a single work, not even a spelling book, a geography, books one would think the last which could contain erroneous doctrines can be found, which does not more or less convey views inimical to Judaism... The only remedy then we have, is to afford our people an opportunity of imbibing good and wholesome doctrines by the same channel with which they are made acquainted with error, that is, the means of cheap books."20

Leeser sought financial assistance to keep the Jewish Publication Society in existence.

> "The enterprise is not a local nor a personal one; it was, it is true, commenced in Philadelphia, and this too by the present president and chairman of the publication committee; but only in order that literature of a Jewish kind might be diffused all over the land, at a cost so trifling that the poorest man might be able to participate in its benefits. That our anticipations have not been realized, is not our fault; that the rich have not stepped forward to endow our treasury with the requisite funds, in the absence of subscribers, is no blame to us. But if we Jews had among us a tithe of the zeal of Christians, who spend their thousands in facts, prayerbooks, and Bibles, for gratuitous distribution all over the land, we should not have been compelled to wait the slow incoming of the individual subscriptions."21

But, the call for financial assistance fell on deaf ears. When a fire broke out in the place where the printed books were stored, the public found this an opportune time to dissolve the Society. It was not until 1888, that the Society was reestablished.

The desire to print sufficient textbooks failed, yet Leeser and his like-minded friends were able to experiment in other areas. Leeser soon realized that while textbooks were vital to rear an educated Jewish population, teachers were also necessary to transmit their knowledge to their students. Teachers can instruct children without proper textbooks; but nothing can be accomplished without the teachers.

> "We contend, moreover, that we know of but one remedy in the premises, and that is, the establishment of Jewish schools, and the selection of Jewish teachers of enlightenment and high endowment to sit in the teacher's chair."22

In 1841 Isaac Leeser and Louis Salomon, also of Philadelphia, proposed an organizational scheme for an educational system aimed at effecting unity.[23]

Thus, Leeser comments in the Occident:

> "It was thought that the want of the American Israelites was threefold; first it was felt that in all matters of religious inquiry we needed the instant presence of a spiritual tribunal before which all questions could be brought for decision; secondly, the necessity of good schools for religious and scientific instruction, in which the Jewish child could obtain a guide to divert his path to heaven; and thirdly, that we required the promotion of a thorough union, the harmonizing of angry feeling should any such arise amongst our individuals and congregations."[24]

In an article entitled "The Schools", Leeser and Salomon suggested several proposals for establishing better schools. In one of the sections under this heading, Leeser and Salomon recommended:

> "A High School for education in the higher branches...where young men are to be educated in such a manner, that they may be fit for the office of Hazan, lecturer, and teacher: and young women be educated for the high calling of female instructors; and all persons educated in our schools, are to have the preference if any vacancy occurs, for any office in the gift of this Union."[25]

Leeser and Salomon also recommended that a general fund of the community pay the teachers, that the courses include Hebrew, Bible, and Talmud, that a board to supervise be appointed, and that courses be strictly Jewish.[26]

Leeser anticipated that these proposals would help to alleviate the educational crises, but soon Leeser realized that the educational system was not in danger at its base but at its summit. Leeser discovered that the educational process works in reverse. The initial effort required a school for the training of rabbis as the first step in remedying the educational process. Leeser prods his readers:

> "And where are the seminaries which are to diffuse the kind of knowledge which is to have this effect? Show us one school in all the

> extent of the Union and the West Indies, where a general education, combined with a thorough religious training, can be obtained, and we will be satisfied to say that something has been done. But we cannot designate a single institution which will come up to the requirements of the age, and anything short of this is not sufficient for our purpose....For the first step, it would be best to continue the execution of the idea here shadowed forth, to one single establishment, to serve as a general High School and a nursery of teachers, who, after completing their scholastic course, would be able to commence preparatory seminaries in all congregations of Israelites throughout the land."[27]

Leeser proposed a high school program as an important beginning. He wrote in the pages of the Occident his solution:

> "We see but one remedy for the evil, and this is to establish a high school for general education in some central position; we care little where this be, whether in England or America, whence may issue men of ample religious and literary endowments, known to the congregations, and therefore likely to be chosen with a full knowledge of their personal history, in addition to that of their acquirements; men in whose hands the future destinies of their respective congregations could be placed with perfect safety; men who, presiding over those who were their school friends and playmates, might carry with them the affections as well as the respect of their flocks."[28]

Leeser suggested a course of study that included Hebrew and English, catechism and biblical commentary, mathematics, singing, writing and drawing, and exercises. This was the program for the first year. Later, Latin and French could be included in the course of study.[29] Leeser felt that only limited funds would be needed to commence this project.

Leeser announced the programs in 1847, but his pooposals had little effect. There was one organization that did attempt to implement his program. This institution was the "Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia" which received a charter from the state to teach both secular and religious

subjects in one Pennsylvanian city. When the incorporators of the charter hesitated in implementing the program, Leeser wrote:

> "It is left to the Israelites in America to say whether it shall be merely a legislative grant, or be employed for the advancement of our religious interests...It is evident that something must be done to supply the demand for religious training; many congregations are now seeking for proper ministers."[30]

Christian colleges sprout up everywhere, yet where are the Jews who will support one Jewish college. Leeser's pleas reached deaf ears, yet the lack of an American rabbinate still existed. Leeser would not give up hope.

Besides pleading with his readers for their support in establishing a high school as a preliminary stage in producing an American rabbinate, Leeser appealed for a seminary. "We say it, with heartfelt sorrow, there is no school either in England or America, where a Jewish student of theology could be educated, or whence he might issue forth as an able representative of his religion, and a ready expounder of the Word."[31]

Leeser realized that if a high school and seminary met with little response, other avenues should be investigated to supply ministers, even though he himself rejected other possibilities as illusory.

Leeser understood that the urgency for qualified ministers would increase over the years. He believed that in the next twenty years the demand for ministers would multiply ten-fold.[32] Where will these ministers be found? Leeser wrote:

> "We know that some will maintain that we can get ministers enough from the continent of Europe, where education is widely extended, and men of piety are always procurable. But without at all derogating from the well-established reputation for learning enjoyed

> by our continental brothers, we cannot by any means assent to the proposition that they can readily assume the ministerial functions in our congregations."[33]

But how, Leeser pondered, can anyone investigate the moral character of the ministers when they live in Europe? "Their reputation is generally a matter of uncertainty; they may, or may not be highly learned; for who knows the extent of their acquirements? Who has examined them? Who testifies to their general good character?"[34]

The character of the minister was an important matter, not to be taken lightly. Ministers were under scrutiny for many years before gaining the complete trust of their congregants.

> "We need in the ministry men to whom no suspicion can attach for any misconduct, whose moral and religious conduct is beyond reproach; and no matter what foreigner there be among us, we have no warrant, unless there are many who personally know him, that we ought to entrust him with our most important concerns, except only after a long residence here, and an intimate acqaintance, on our part, with his intellectual and moral worth."[35]

Leeser thought that by providing for the minister's financial security, possibly more would seek the profession. "Let it then be a first step in the reformation of the personnel of our ministry to place its members above want, and then demand that every incumbent should fit to grace the station which he fills."[36] In many congregations, financial standing was not the only difficulty the minister confronted in his congregation.

> "We have long since desired to converse with our friends on the anomalous position which our ministry occupies in America; it is in fact (sic) has no regular standing beyond what every congregation assigns to its own elected officers. An independent ministry is at present

> unkwnown amongst us, and we care not whether the officer is known by Rabbi, Preacher, or Hazan, he will be surrounded by a multitude of difficulties, simply because his precise rank is as little defined to his own satisfaction as it is to that of others."37

The lack of ministers continued to remain critical. Children required the instruction of teachers and the inspiration of a minister. The adult congregation needed a minister as well. Leeser opposed calling for ministers from abroad. He felt possibly that with a more secure position, an increase of men seeking the ministry would result. But, Leeser was incorrect. His high school proposal failed; his seminary never materialized. How would the children be trained and the needs of the ministers administered? Leeser had a temporary solution. Lay preachers would fill the existing void.

> "When one of these sees his neighbor go astray, be the transgression great or small, let him appeal to him in the accents of friendly admonition, persuade him if need be by words of entreaty, to reflect upon his conduct, and to compare it with the universal standard of our faith."38

A more reasonable solution was suggested by Leeser.

> "The proper remedy which has been suggested before this by others, no less than ourself; has been offered by our correspondent; it is to send those now in the country, and others who may hereafter enter into the ministry, over the length and breadth of the land as missionaries, in order to visit congregations who are not duly supplied, and even those who have preachers or lecturers, and to exhort them to walk in the way of the Lord."39

Leeser presumed that with a mobile ministry many Jews could hear the words of the ministers.

While his high school project failed and his seminary project did no better, his desire for establishing a college had a short success.

A charter for Maimonides College was secured from the state, and plans commenced to establish the school. Funds were not as readily available as Leeser anticipated; however, lay leaders did support the project with great determination. The Education Society of Philadelphia already had a charter from the state for such a project. The previous charter was offered eighteen years ago and remained unused until then. Once the Education Society adopted the plan, the Society elected Trustees to supervise the college project. Five professors were elected without compensation.[40] Some endowed money was collected and hope for the college's success was high. The college was pledged neither to reform nor orthodoxy but to Judaism.[41] The college would promote both scientific and religious education without any leaning to one movement or another.[42] Five distinguished members constituted the faculty of the new college.

The real obstacle this time was neither financial nor a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the committee or its leaders. The difficulty was that the college project evoked no real interest in the Jewish community. When the driving spirit, Isaac Leeser, died in 1868, Maimonides College was doomed to failure. The college faltered for a time, but in 1873 the college closed its doors for a lack of students. Only three students graduated before the doors closed. Yet, some years thereafter, the Jewish Theological Seminary began successfully in the same edifice. This time the vision of Isaac Leeser became a living memorial to him.

Education was for Isaac Leeser of major importance. Leeser made his educational program readily known to all.

> "We want first of all Schools, where every Jewish parent can, if he will, send his children to learn the duties of their religion...Secondly, we need, and must have a

> a better regulated worship; more order, more decorum, more quiet, more attention...Thirdly, we require more frequent pulpit instruction by highly educated men...Fourthly, we must have, sooner or later, but the sooner the better, a federal union of all congregations on the continent and islands of America...We must have a college of Rabbis to decide for us questions of law and all matters pertaining to religion... Seventhly, we ought to have, either in addition to, or in the college of Rabbins, traveling missionaries, who should visit once or oftener, every year, all the accessible congregations, and settlements of Israelites...We should have as an auxiliary to all the above, a Jewish Publication Society, with branches in every town and village."[43]

This is in capsule form a resumé of all the major projects Isaac Leeser sponsored through his work and proclaimed in his magazine with all the persuasion at his command.

Leeser exerted tremendous energies for the cause of an educated American Israelite community. In the Occident, Leeser wrote of his passionate concern and devotion to the improvement of religious education in America. This attachment is nowhere better expressed than in Leeser's own words:

> "For these twenty years nearly have we urged the subject of religious education as paramount to all other spiritual improvements; no reformation is equal to it; no sacrifices are too great for it; and whilst we have the power to write or to speak shall it be the theme of our declamation."[44]

FOOTNOTES

1 Moshe Davis, The Emergence of Conservative Judaism, (The Jewish Publication Society of America; Philadelphia, 1963) p. 34

2 Isaac Leeser, Ed., The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, (Philadelphia) Vol. I, No. 9; December, 1843; pp. 411-412.

3 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 9; December, 1843; p. 413.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 10; January, 1855; pp. 477-478.

7 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 1; April, 1850; p. 6.

8 Ibid., Vol. IX, No. 2; May, 1851; pp; 104-105.

9 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 2; May, 1843; p; 104.

10 Ibid., Vol. X, No. 8; November, 1852; p. 412

11 Moshe Davis, op. cit., p. 40.

12 Ibid., p. 41.

13 Occident, Vol. I, No. 1; April, 1843; p. 38.

14 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 2; May, 1843; p. 108.

15 Moshe Davis, op. cit., p. 43.

16 Ibid., pp. 44-45.

17 Ibid., p. 45.

18 Occident, Vol. II, No. 1; April, 1844; pp. 2-3.

19 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 11; February, 1845; pp. 525-526.

20 Ibid., Vol. V, No. 9; December, 1847; p. 457.

21 Ibid., Vol. VI, No. 8; November, 1848; p. 411.

22 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 3; June, 1846; p. 113.

23 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 4; July, 1845; pp. 175-176.

24 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 5; August, 1845; p. 217.

25 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 5; August, 1845; p. 225.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 11; February, 1847; p. 523.

28 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 10; January, 1847; p. 475.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., Vol. VII, No. 2; May, 1849; p. 102.

31 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 7; October, 1844; p. 317.

32 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 10; January, 1847; p. 471.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 7; October, 1844; p. 315.

35 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 10; January, 1847; pp. 473-474.

36 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 12; March, 1846; p. 582.

37 Ibid., Vol. XX, No. 8; November, 1862; p. 339.

38 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 2; May, 1844; p. 65.

39 Ibid., Vol. XVI, No. 7; October, 1858; pp. 304-305.

40 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 5; August, 1867; p. 224.

41 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 5; August, 1867; p. 226.

42 Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 5; August, 1867; p. 227.

43 Ibid., Vol. X, No. 5; August, 1852; pp. 236-237.

44 Ibid., Vol. VII, No. 2; May, 1849; p. 103.

CHAPTER V

THE ROLE OF THE SERMON AS AN INSTRUMENT OF EDUCATION

Isaac Leeser realized the educational deficiencies of American Jews very soon after assuming his position at Mikveh Israel. Leeser desired to be more than a hazan, a "singing minister" to his congregation; he wanted also to be a teacher to his flock. Although Leeser frequently apologized for his inadequate learning, he was constantly prepared to learn more. Yet, education for Leeser was not an end in itself, but a means of instructing others in the faith of Judaism. Leeser's life-long determination to promote a more effective educational structure through the establishment of Jewish schools, and a rabbinical college, has been outlined in the last chapter. Schools, colleges, and textbook materials, however, did not exhaust Leeser's zealous efforts on behalf of education. Other avenues for improving the educational levels of American Jews were utilized. The Occident served as one instrument for educating a large Jewish audience. Another was the sermon. Leeser utilized the sermon to inspire, reprove, and lecture his audiences, as well as to take advantage of the educational value intrinsic to a good sermon.

Leeser chose the Occident as one avenue for spreading Jewish religious education throughout America. He utilized his magazine to disseminate knowledge to all Jews scattered in the Western United States. Leeser's efforts to publish enormous quantities of religious material by editing, translating, and publishing textbooks and other manuscripts, served as another means of spreading his message to all corners of the globe. The Occident was one such avenue open to Leeser. In the magazine he carefully outlined his purposes for the monthly editions. In essence

Leeser made the Occident an important vehicle for his sermons, inspiring his readers to abide by his words.

Leeser outlined the purposes of the Occident for his readers. The magazine enlightened Jews scattered in other parts of the country who had no arguments to offset Christian doctrinal claims.

> "We cannot consider a Jewish periodical complete which altogether overlooks the fact that we are sourrounded by a multitude whose doctrines differ so widely from our own, and that, especially among such a scattered population as ours, it is highly necessary to furnish them, through means of the press, some ready arguments against the attacks of those who may occasionally invite them to forsake their religion."[1]

Leeser printed in the Occident notices of all public religious meetings, society affairs, and all congregational activities. He requested that the presidents or secretaries of all these organizations send him condensed accounts of their meetings and activities. Isaac Leeser had a sense of history, realizing that "such a regular service would serve as the best history of American Jews."[2]

Leeser's magazine attempted to fill a void existing in America. Before the Occident, there was no magazine which supplied articles on Jewish religious matters. Leeser tried "to furnish religious reading to our American and English friends, and to fill up in a measure the want of a religious literature which has hitherto been so much a cause of reproach to us."[3] The Occident also was a link between distant congregations.

Above all, Leeser's magazine was always available to opponents who desired to argue opposing views,

> "Ours is a free press, uncontrolled by party or section; and when it is appealed to in order to expose any abuse which may perchance be amended by means of publicity, we shall

> not hesitate to place it at the service of correspondents, always providing that their language be courteous, their statements truthful, and that they treat their opponents with candor and fairness."[4]

The Occident served as an instrument of education. Frequently, Leeser reiterated the magazine's goals. "Our business is to teach and to improve; to present Judaism in its proper light."[5] On the fly leaf of every Occident, Leeser's motto for life is inscribed "To learn and to teach, to observe and to do." Often Leeser reiterated his magazine's course.

> "To observe and to do all the precepts of law, which come within our range, is easy enough, when we are correctly instructed, when we correctly think. To believe alone is not the province of the Jewish religion, to act also is its demand. Let us then not deny ourselves the aspiration, that with increase of light an increase of righteousness may likewise prevail, and that the name of the Lord may be glorified in the hearts and through mouths of millions, who are strangers to his service."[6]

Leeser was not an impartial editor. His own views were candidly laid before the public. "Although we profess a strict impartiality, we have opinions of our own which we shall not hesitate to avow with becoming firmness upon every proper occasion."[7] Leeser sought to provide his readers with religious truth. At times, Leeser argued that articles appearing in the Occident were not true. In such cases, he wrote articles which attempted to show the error of his opponents view.

Isaac Leeser's major purpose in writing the monthly magazine was, as has been said, to improve the educational knowledge of American Israelites. Leeser stated this objective in the first issue. "But as we stated that it is our object to give currency to articles which elucidate our peculiar opinions, we shall endeavor to give every month one

sermon by one of the modern Jewish preachers on some topic of general interest."[8] Leeser contributed a sermon on some topic of religious value in nearly every issue of the Occident. Occasionally, Leeser inserted sermons written by men not in the ministry.[9] These sermons were written by lay preachers who served congregations in all sections of America.

The sermons in the Occident were one avenue of providing religious education to Jews. Sermons were an instrument of the educational process. Thus, by inserting various sermons into his magazine, Leeser anticipated that spiritual growth for all would result. Even before the Occident, however, Leeser had established the sermon pattern in America.

Leeser began preaching to his congregation in Philadelphia in 1830, some thirteen years before the appearance of the Occident. Preaching was a way of bringing all the treasures of Judaism to the public. His sermons in the synagogue were preached in English. Leeser realized that the sermon was a unique addition to the service, yet it was vital to the moral character of American Israelites. The service was performed weekly in the same manner.

> "In most congregations men assemble week after week, and hear nothing but the ritual performed, we will admit often in the most edifying and touching manner. We are, therefore, habituated to a service without sermon, the children grow up without even feeling that its absence is any deprivation."[10]

Leeser felt that a new educational instrument, the sermon, would edify his listeners.

Isaac Leeser was a fair man. A sermon should not be imposed upon an audience. On the contrary, only those who desired to hear words of instruction should attend the discourse. Leeser resolved this situation

by preaching to the congregation at the end of the service.

> "Let the people be once accustomed to expect a religious discourse at the end of, or during some convenient pause in the service, and they will at length not think their exercises complete without having listened to an exposition of some part of God's holy word, by which the untaught may learn, and the learned be fortified in faith." 11

Leeser's introduction of the sermon into the service created differences of opinion in the traditional and reform camp. Since Leeser's sermons adhered to strict traditional views in religion, Reformers thought Leeser to be Orthodox. Yet, Leeser's insistence on the inclusion of the sermon in the regular service, caused Orthodox circles to suspect Leeser to be a reformer. Leeser thought that sermons could be accepted "by making them general, by instituting them as part of the regular services, at least twice a month, if not every Sabbath and festival".[12]

Leeser justified his sermons from Jewish tradition. He demonstrated that from the earliest times preaching had been practiced. "Public oratory was cultivated in the 'Schools of the Prophets', which appear to have had their origin soon after the schism of Israel and Judah." [13]

Leeser heard discourses also as a young man.

> "This is effected in Europe where, if there be no regular preacher in a congregation, the school master reads and explains a lecture from some ancient book to the assembled people on Sabbath afternoon before Minchah service; at least this used to be the case when we were a little boy in our father's house, and we remember yet many of these very lectures, the chief import of which has not faded from our memory after the lapse of thirty years." 14

Leeser felt that sermons made a strong impression upon children's minds. Leeser himself was instructed by them. Why wouldn't other children be inspired now as well?

When Leeser assumed his position in 1829 at Mikveh Israel, no sermon was incorporated into the service. Leeser obtained permission to preach from the Board of Adjunta of his congregation; however, a restriction was imposed upon him. The sermon only could be included at the end of the service.[15]

Isaac Leeser was the first preacher of a Jewish sermon in America.[16] He deserves all the credit. "But while disclaiming all egotistical views, we cannot deem it just in other writers purposely to overlook our pioneership in this branch of literature."[17] No doubt Leeser's own exposure to a sermon or discourse in his youth greatly influenced him. He had no previous precedents to follow for his sermonic style. At twenty-two years of age, such a pioneering step was no small task for Isaac Leeser. "It was a painful experiment, the issue of which I greatly dreaded."[18] He had no models to use for fashioning his own sermons. Possibly Leeser utilized some German sermons or a few Christian sermons he had heard at various times.

At first, Leeser wrote out his sermons and delivered them from a manuscript. Due to his poor eyesight and short stature, Leeser found it difficult to read his prepared manuscript.[19] Leeser soon learned to deliver sermons without any notes before him. He urged all those aspiring to become preachers to do a lot of thinking before writing a sermon. Writing a sermon was not an easy task.

Leeser's sermons were not short educational discourses. Most of his sermons were nearly fifteen pages in length, some were even longer. Listening to those addresses would tax the patience of even the most devotedly religious man. His sermons began with a long prayer, read in

English. This prayer was the only one recited in English as Leeser did not permit English in the service. Since the sermon was given in English after the service, the insertion of a prayer at this point did not violate Leeser's principles. Leeser's sermons ended with a prayer as well.

Although Leeser was very Orthodox in his religious practice, he seldom included rabbinic sources. His authority was the Bible; however, a biblical text was not a starting point for his sermons. On the contrary, his biblical text was placed in the middle of his sermon only as an incidental reference. Leeser defended himself on this point.

> "In place of giving out a text and stringing a sermon to the same, as is customary with most preachers, I have generally chosen to introduce it in the middle or even at the conclusion of my discourses; because I desired to illustrate a doctrinal point and then show its consonance with the text of Scripture, believing this course less fatiguing and more interesting to the audience than the usual mode."[20]

His sermons were unquestionably long, his style tedious, his topic not always appealing; yet, Isaac Leeser's reputation spread throughout the United States. Leeser spoke to congregations across the country, traveling under great personal stress and without financial compensation. Leeser reported that he had traveled more than 5,200 miles, visiting more than twenty-five settlements.[21] "I have been privileged to address more various congregations, and I thank God that I have done it without the least recompense."[22] Isaac M. Wise, Leeser's strongest opponent, said of Leeser's sermons: "He spoke fast, a good English, but not always good logic."[23] Leeser was held in the highest esteem by the American Jewish community and he was given in various instances tangible proof of their affection for his work. Leeser became a national figure.

Isaac Leeser's sermons bear no relation to sermons of today. Leeser's

sermons were topical. Seldom did Leeser preach on current issues of his day. Leeser evaded the American Jewish scene almost entirely. During the years of the Civil War, Leeser never addressed himself in his sermons to the problems facing the nation. Not only did Leeser not preach on the evils of the Civil War, but he seldom even mentioned the War's existence in any articles, appearing in the Occident. Leeser's religious orientation was towards the individual and his salvation; hence, the external world (Civil War, etc.) would be viewed as largely irrelevant. Leeser spoke almost entirely on theology. Such subjects as God, Messiah, Resurrection, Miracles, Reward and Punishments were the topics that interested him. Leeser founded his magazine with the sole aim of spreading religious knowledge throughout the country. Most probably, Leeser avoided controversial topics because education, not sensationalism, was his primary purpose. Leeser realized that Jews in America were not educated on religious topics, so he preached educational sermons to them. Leeser could not encourage improved educational standards among Jews as well as preach on topics relating to the ills of his society. He nearly evaded the whole American scene, though not entirely. When situations arose affecting Jews, Leeser spoke out in earnest. Leeser preached sermons on the implication of the Damascus Affair. In a sermon addressed to the congregants of Mikveh Israel on August 27, 1840, Leeser preached about the deplorable situation existing with the Jews and the necessity for relief for them. Resolutions were subsequently drafted asking for assistance.[24] When Jews were on the defensive, Leeser came to their defense. His sermons on conditions outside the United States, awoke American Israelites to the needs of Jews in other parts of the country.

Social and political issues could not be the major subject of his

sermons since Leeser had dedicated his magazine and himself to furthering religious education in America. Thus, Leeser committed himself to preaching on theological topics which would educate his audience as well as instruct them along those avenues he himself held true.

Leeser wrote on the whole spectrum of theology. His main principles followed the same pattern as Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith.

> "The main principles of our belief then, are, first, the existence of God including his unity, eternity, unchangeability, incorporeality, and sole claim to worship; secondly, the existence of revelation from the God of all nature, including the confidence in the truth of the prophets, especially the great teacher of Israel, Moses, the son of Amram, and the certainty that this revelation is yet in our possession;....thirdly, the existence of rewards and punishments, including the inherent power of God to know all that is done in any part of his world by the beings whom He has created; fourthly, the coming of a messenger to be specially deputed by God to fulfill all the promises which have ever been made,..... and fifthly, the resurrection of the dead." [25]

Leeser preached frequently about the Unity of God. Since Christians and Jews were interacting more than ever before, Leeser desired to clarify the foundations of Jewish belief. Revelation was the one belief which makes our religion uniques. "Let it be clearly understood that our religion is true, not because other systems are false, but because it is based upon divine revelation, which to a believer is the only source of truth."[26] The most important verses in the Bible are "In the beginning God created" and "God spoke all these words". From these two sentences, we know that God created the world and is a personal God. "And it was God who spoke; not a delegate of the highest power, not a mediator." [27] Leeser believed in a personal Creator who possessed infinite power.

Leeser spoke also about miracles which are performed to convince man of already existing truths.

> "Miracles are the instruments of the Lord to work conviction upon the minds of people of truths already existing or to effect certain purposes which he deems of sufficient importance for Him to subvert for a time or permanently the laws of nature."[28]

Thus, Leeser believed that all the miracles at Sinai were performed to strengthen Israel in her adherence to God.

Leeser preached in his sermons of the literal truth of the Bible.

> "We must come back to the Bible as the best light within our reach; and that a literal, fair, and unconstrained reading of the original text of the Bible, is the last and only true arbiter in regard to duty and doctrine."[29]

Prophets who spoke falsely about God should be punished. "Whatever is taught by the prophets must be accepted as true belief and conduct by all Israelites."[30]

Man's suffering was a punishment for sins, yet sometimes our suffering is actually a blessing in disguise. Through suffering, a man is strengthened in his belief in God and in his moral character.

> "All this proves, incontestably, that the so-called evil is part of providential rule, and one of the changes which we must undergo in order to be able to assume that station or state of existence for which we were created."[31]

Through suffering, man grows in spiritual stature. Leeser knew that Jews believed in a resurrection and life hereafter. To this Leeser answered: "What then, is death, even as we find it, but a transmutation from one state to another?"[32] Indeed resurrection did occur according to Isaac Leeser's views.

Education was so fundamentally a part of Judaism and so vital for

the American Jews that Isaac Leeser could not refrain from preaching his ideas. How could all the Jews in America, scattered as they were, become knowledgeable Jews? Education was the only answer. Leeser resoved the problem of education by writing, editorializing, sermonizing, and preaching whenever the opportunities arose for him. No issue was too insignificant to gain his attention. He directed all his efforts toward improving the knowledge of American Jews. Leeser's sole purpose in writing the Occident was to disseminate a better knowledge and appreciation of Judaism. His passionate efforts on behalf of education drove him to perform Herculean tasks by himself. Leeser thought at times his efforts were in vain, but we who judge him now view not his hours of despair, anguish, and frustration, but his success.

FOOTNOTES

1 Isaac Leeser, Ed., The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, (Philadelphia) Vol. I, 1843; preface.

2 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 1; April, 1843; p. 5.

3 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 1; April, 1846; p. 2

4 Ibid., Vol. XVIII, No. 1; March, 1860; p. 1.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 3; June, 1843; p. 111.

7 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 1; April, 1843; p. 5.

8 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 1; April, 1843; p. 4.

9 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 1; April, 1844; p. 3.

10 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 5; August, 1850; pp. 210-211.

11 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 5; August, 1850; pp. 212-213.

12 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 5; August, 1850; p. 212.

13 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 8; November, 1844; p. 388.

14 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 5; August, 1850; p. 213.

15 Isaac Leeser, Discourses on the Jewish Religion, (Sherman and Co., Philadelphia, 1867) Vol. I, p. 2.

16 Occident, Vol. XX, No. 8; November, 1862; pp. 345-346.

17 Ibid., Vol. XX, No. 8; November, 1862; pp. 346-347.

18 Discourses, Vol. I, p. 2. (1867)

19 Occident, Vol. XX, No. 8; November, 1862; p. 345.

20 Discourses, Vol. I, Preface, p. 10.

21 Occident, Vol. X, No. 1; April, 1852; p. 2.

22 Ibid., Vol. X, No. 11; February, 1853; p. 514.

23 The American Israelite, February 14, 1868.

24 Discourses, Vol. III, 1867; p. 363.

25 Occident, Vol. V, No. 11; February, 1848; pp. 528-529.

26 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 1; April, 1844; p. 4.

27 Ibid., Vol. XV, No. 5; August, 1857; p. 211.

28 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 1; April, 1843; p. 20.

29 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 6; September, 1850; p. 268.

30 Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 6; September, 1850; p. 273.

31 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 12; March, 1844; p. 581.

32 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 12; March, 1844; p. 580.

CHAPTER VI

REFORM - ORTHODOX CONTROVERSY

Isaac Leeser had led the American Jewish community toward a better system of religious education. Throughout his life, all his energies were directed towards improving the education of children and adults. He was a pioneer in the field of religious education, publishing textbooks, writing sermons and lectures, pleading for high schools and colleges, and editing his own magazine which was a primary organ for disseminating religion to the masses. All his efforts were concentrated on this aim. "Educate! This is the remedy, and without it all talk is vain."[1] While Leeser exerted all his energies to improve religious education in America, he also battled against the Reform movement. This battle became more odious to him as Reform gained strength. Reform became Leeser's main battle.

From nearly the beginning of Isaac Leeser's career as a minister, he had to contend with the Reform movement. Seven Jewish congregations were organized when Leeser came to America; all of them followed the Orthodox rite, except for one Reform congregation in Charleston, South Carolina. When Rev. G. Poznanski was elected reader and preacher in 1836, the Reform movement had its first leader. Leeser had recommended Poznanski for the position in Charleston; however, Leeser suggested him under the assumption that Poznanski followed the Orthodox rite.

Rev. Poznanski was a Polish Jew and a shochet in New York before assuming his position in Charleston. He was known as an Orthodox Jew when he first came to Beth Elohim in Charleston. He brought a revival of Judaism during his first years in Charleston.

> "Respectful demeanor and proficiency in his clerical duties, produced an evident improvement in the tone, manner, and general arrangement in the service of the Synagogue. His occasional discourses and appropriate prayers in the English language, acquired and commanded the best attention. Many were induced to attend public worship who were previously neglectful. The indifferent were made to throw off the garb of indifference. The house of God was better attended. The unlettered in our ancient tongue desired instruction. Parents sought to have their children taught, not only the rudiments but the translations; and a more earnest respect for our religion began to pervade all classes of our people."[2]

After two years in Charleston, the congregation was destroyed by a fire which left the building in total ruins. A new building was built immediately. Rev. Poznanski received a life contract from the congregation. During this time, Leeser noted that Rev. Poznanski spoke to Nathan Hart, the parnass of the congregation about "erecting an organ in the new structure".[3] Nothing further was mentioned until July, 1840, when Isaac Leeser received numerous letters from members of Rev. Poznanski's congregation, asking Leeser about the legality of such a move.[4] Leeser was naturally shocked by Rev. Poznanski's apparent change from a strict observer to a reformer.

Leeser quickly took issue with Rev. Poznanski's new religious position. Leeser felt responsible to Beth Elohim for recommending Rev. Poznanski who now assumed a different religious view. Leeser wrote:

> "When you were elevated to the office of Hazan to the Portuguese Jewish congregation of Charleston, called Beth Elohim, I rejoiced that one whom I thought deserving of the elevated position, had been chosen by our friends of Charleston; and I think there are yet in existence sundry letters of recommendation, which, unknown to you, I addressed to several influential gentlemen in that city and elsewhere. I did this under the full persuasion

> that you were a strict conformist, and an orthodox believer, as these terms are understood among us. Had I suspected that you studied the Rabbins merely to refute their authority by collecting passages not connected with each other except by twisting the apparent meanings of words, or that you favored the party....called that of ultra-reformist; I would have been the last to countenance your elevation----to that of Hazan of Charleston."[5]

The whole community was astonished by Rev. Poznanski's views. In a sermon extract published in the Charleston Courier at the time of the dedication of the new synagogue on March 19, 1841, Rev. Poznanski was quoted in the paper as saying: "This land is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem this house our Temple."[6] Leeser replied that Poznanski "evidently denied the coming of the Messiah, and the restoration of the temple and ancient worship".[7] Rev. Poznanski had introduced music into the service and later abolished the second day of Jewish holidays. In response to Poznanski's abolition of the second day of the Jewish holidays, Leeser wrote:

> "But it is evident to every unprejudiced mind that the organ would necessarily lead to further changes, as it accorded with the measures introduced by a patron of Jews in Europe, who have made many innovations not only in the worship, but also in the ideas of Ancient Jews."[8]

When Rev. Poznanski was asked whether other changes would be suggested in the future, he announced that future innovations would not be advised "until the general desire of the congregation to hear the truth on every religious subject, and to have our holy religion divested of all its errors and abuses shall be expressed to me through their representatives, your honorable board."[9]

Leeser wrote a long public letter to Rev. Poznanski, asking him to withdraw himself from the dangerous course he was pursuing.[10] Poznanski

never answered the letter, nor did he ever enter into any controversy with Isaac Leeser. Rev. Poznanski had denied the resurrection, yet sang yigdal. He substituted the Maimonidian creed for his own which he hung on a synagogue wall. Poznanski evidently never rebutted Leeser's strong opposition; for no account of Rev. Poznanski's answer was ever published in the Occident. Because of dissension in Beth Elohim, Poznanski resigned in 1843, but the majority of the congregation was strongly behind him and refused his resignation. Yet, Rev. Poznanski thought that another minister would be best for the congregation.[11]

Julius Eckman of Richmond became the minister of Beth Elohim. Leeser hoped that Eckman would bring the congregation back to Orthodoxy. Eckman rebuked his new congregation for accepting the new Reform forms of worship and thought. When Rev. Poznanski desired to assist Rev. Eckman at the Yom Kippur services, Eckman refused on the ground that Poznanski did not adhere to the truths expressed in the prayers.[12] Nonetheless, Rev. Poznanski still wielded great authority over the congregation. Two petitions were signed; one asking Eckman to resign, the other asking him to remain in his post. Leeser Championed Eckman's cause, calling in the Occident for Rev. Eckman not to resign. If, after Eckman's term of office expired, the congregation wished to elect another man, Leeser thought such would then be proper. But there was also the possibility that Eckman might win over the members to his position.[13] Eckman left the congregation shortly thereafter; Maurice Mayer became the minister in 1852.

In 1844 Leeser thought the Reform would eventually revert to Orthodoxy. "No doubt the evil will in process of time cure itself."[14] Leeser presumed that Reform was merely a transitional period existing among

American Jews which would soon be forgotten.[15] He exerted great energies to uproot the evils of Reform. He wrote numerous articles between 1844 and 1846 about Reform in Europe. Such articles as "The Frankfort Reform Society", "The Conference of French Rabbins" and "The First and Second Meeting of German Rabbis" were directed at awaking people to the follies of Reform. In the "Frankfort Reform Society", Leeser wrote:

> "In our estimation the above Society is but an evidence of the deplorable state of irreligion in which many of the continental Jews are sunk; and this new manifestation which consists in the rejection of the rite of circumcision, as well as the authority of the Talmud is but a step, though a very important one."[16]

Leeser attacked the various conferences that took place in 1844 at Brunswick, in 1845 at Frankfort on the Main, and in 1846 at Breslau. Regardless of whatever good could proceed from such meetings, Leeser was convinced that the results would be detrimental to Judaism.

> "But of this we are certain, that the Brunswick assembly justifies our various articles on the reformers and their reforms, that the first do not seek the peace of Israel, and that the latter are not calculated to harmonize with our institutions even if we discard all rabbinical authority."[17]

Leeser had nothing but praise for Zechariah Frankel who left the Frankfort on the Main conference when the course of the meeting was contrary to his beliefs and practices.[18]

At the Brunswick conference, Dr. Ludwig Philippson laid before the members of the assembly a motion to permit mixed marriages with the sole restriction "where the law of the land would allow the children to be educated in Judaism".[19] Leeser commented that one would presume that the Bible sanctions these marriages, yet such is not the case. "It is indeed singular that these great men did not consult the Scriptures be-

fore they pronounced judgment; one would almost be tempted to believe that they had studied everything but the Scriptures."[20] Leeser took issue also against the assumption that if the partners promised the rabbi to raise their children as Jews, the mixed marriage would then be sanctioned by the assembly. What guarantee have we that the promise would be fulfilled? Furthermore, Leeser argued,

> "How can a Christian woman receive a ring from a Jew, under the sanction of a religion which she does not believe in? It is true, that a Jewish marriage is to a certain extent a civil contract; but still it is always performed with religious sanction, and before lawful Jewish witness."[21]

How could a Christian promise to educate her children as Jews when she takes the oath as a Christian and not as a Jew? The Christian would agree to teach the children about one God while believing in the Trinity. "A Christian to marry a Jew in the law of Moses."[22] Leeser found such ideas completely alien.

Leeser begged the German ministers to look at the result of mixed marriage in America. There were no restraints upon mixed marriages between Jews and Christians. Isolated in small communities Jews and Christians intermarried; the children attended Christian schools, and soon they were raised according to the Christian faith. Some children married into families because of position or money. A few intermarriages resulted in the children of mixed marriages being brought up as Jews. Yet, this was the exception not the rule. In most cases, Leeser noted that the homes of mixed marriages were managed according to Christian customs. Judaism's ideals soon became lost within the framework of the home.

Leeser suggested severe measures for those Jews who married out of

their faith.

> "If, therefore, a child should forget his allegiance to his God by espousing a non-Israelite; it is at once the duty of parents to withdraw from his fellowship; and his brothers and sisters, and other relatives, should follow in the same path, and not recognize the person brought into their family without the sanction of the Jewish laws, by the terms which the world applies in such cases."[23]

Maurice Mayer became the minister of Beth Elohim in Charleston in 1852. Dr. Mayer succeeded Rev. Eckman in the congregation. Mayer was not orthodox but progressive in his outlook. Mayer's ideas were formed during the early period of Reform in America. Isaac M. Wise had not yet dawned upon the American scene. Leeser viewed Mayer's suggestions in his congregation with the usual vocal dissension. In a series of articles on Progressive Reforms, Leeser criticized Mayer's position. Leeser said about the new reforms:

> "In sorrow, not in anger, we would ask the parties alluded to, what good they have ever done to our cause. They have reformed, abolished rather, one thing after the other; they have thrown suspicion first on the mystic philosophy, then on the tradition, and at length they dare to treat the Scriptures themselves as myths, that means fabulous legends, which they are at liberty to interpret as they please, to twist and bend as it may suit their purposes. Where is this to end?"[24]

Leeser criticized Dr. Mayer for his remarks in his Passover sermon. Leeser accused Mayer of reading into the Bible, meanings that never were intended. The Biblical passage read: "And now they gird their loins, now they were ready to depart, because it was fulfilled that all children of Israel shall have light in their dwellings." (Exodus 10:23). How could Mayer presume that the call "have your loins girded" and "ready

to depart" were the origin of Reform? How had such pronouncements aided the cause of Judaism? Had American Jews become more observant? Hardly had such preaching brought any positive results in Leeser's opinion.

> "Dr. Mayer....it is the business of Reform to confirm them in the evil, to teach them that the Sabbath is nothing; that personal sanctity is nothing; that prayer is nothing; but that your (sic) and its light are everything. Ho! ye fools...."[25]

How could anyone presume that the purpose of the Exodus was to promulgate Reform. "Was Reform the mission for which the Israelites were chosen when they left Egypt?"[26] Did not the Exodus permit the Israelites the opportunity of receiving the Law? But Dr. Mayer rendered a different explanation.

> "And now they gird their loins, now they were ready to depart, because it was fulfilled that all the children of Israel shall have light in their dwellings. (Exodus 10:23) So it is reform that is the light which Israelites had in Egypt."[27]

But Leeser argued that the light coming to Israel showed only that Israel was ready to follow God. If Leeser could allegorize, then this passage "commanded even in this late generation to be ready for a contest against unbelief and irreligion".[28] Leeser warned his readers not "to hasten after the idols of the hour, which teach falsehood and lead on to the pitfalls of destruction".[29]

Leeser found no spiritual advantage derived from worshipping once a week for an hour or two.

> "We cannot see that any real solid advantage is obtained by men and women coming to a place of worship, and sitting there listlessly, while music is performed, pieces of prayer recited, and a pretty discourse read off."[30]

Synagogue attendance once a week had become the most important aspect of the reformer's faith. Yet, the Bible nowhere commanded us to build any other house of worship besides the Temple in Jerusalem. Although the Talmud specified that in every town where there was a synagogue, Jews who refrain from entering the synagogue was never meant to be the only obligation incumbent upon Jews.[31] The mitsvoths were not fulfilled after observing a few prayers in the synagogue.

While Isaac Leeser battled reform, Mayer refused to relent from defending reform. Dr. Mayer argued that traditional Judaism was evil, hypocritical, indifferent and without principles. Reformers had been driven to reform by the very circumstances created by their opponents. Traditional Judaism had brought about reform; otherwise Judaism would have been destroyed.[32]

Leeser rebuked Mayer's attack on traditional Judaism. How could Mayer make such statements about traditional Judaism?

> "He certainly does not mean to change the orthodox portion of Israelites, all over the world, with having compelled him and his fellow-laborers to enlist under the flag of reform, and to do a certain amount of reforming under pain of their displeasure."[33]

Did Mayer sincerely believe that in order to save our faith from hypocrisy, apostasy and indifference, Reform was compelled to follow such a destructive course? Where was Mayer's proof of traditional Judaism's faults?

What about the Sabbath? Were not the synagogues empty on the Sabbath? Reform had accommodated all those who could not attend on the Sabbath by holding a Sunday service. How was Dr. Mayer consistent with his reforms? He and his followers demanded a certain quality of spirit-

ual religion. Yet they compromised with certain members who could not attend services on the Sabbath by pleasing the needs of the minority. Judaism would soon become nothing but a diluted faith under such a system.

> "What system do you want to adopt, the Caraitic West-End worship of London, the showy style of the Hamburg temple, or the accomodating course adopted at Berlin? Do you mean to uphold the Sabbath, or change its day? And again, if the first, what will you permit, and what labors will you prohibit?" 34

No, argued Isaac Leeser, Orthodoxy was not responsible for hypocrisy, indifference and apostasy, as Dr. Mayer presumed, but the new Reform teachings were the primary cause.

> "Look over the list of Apostates, such as stand in prominent places in Europe, leaving America out of the question, because they are too few here to be taken into account, and you will find them among those whose families had become gradually estranged from Judaism, who loved Gentiles better than their own brothers, or those who had pursued a course of study which brought them within the limits of temptation."35

If our traditional authority was recognized by the reformers, Leeser admonished, then the reformers would adhere to the ancient laws as in Orthodox teachings, and there would be no need to render any interpretation other than the literal one. Reform cannot accept certain aspects of tradition while refuting others. Our ancient laws are intended to guard us from infractions of the Mosaic law. Whether the reformers denied the chain of tradition, there can be no question that the manner of observing the commandments was more likely in accordance with ancient methods than any recent creation.[36]

The reformers worked very slowly to implement their new system.

Certain prayers in the liturgy were carefully removed from the service. The Reform regulations on marriage, divorce, and converts were entirely different from those of Orthodoxy.[37] Reform spoke about religion, but performed few of the mitsvoth. Orthodoxy was not to blame for the conditions of Jews but an age which had rebelled against truths that had previously stood the test of time was responsible. While Dr. Mayer's views were untenable to the true believer, Leeser was confident that the doctrines of the past would soon obliterate all the methods of reform.

Leeser had taken Mayer sufficiently to task in the Occident to feel confident that Mayer's arguments and reforms were clearly proven fallacious and harmful to Judaism. Unfortunately for Isaac Leeser the battle against reform was just beginning. The seeds for reform came from Germany and were planted in America in the Charleston congregation. From this community, the Reform movement grew and spread into other parts of the country.

When Isaac Leeser first assumed his position in Philadelphia in 1829, there were only six Jewish congregations in America. From this earliest period, the Jews realized the need for some form of unity, but because of personality clashes between the various ministers and the different interpretations of Judaism, union among all Jews became a most perplexing problem. On certain issues, all Jews were united. The Damascus affair in 1840, the Mortara case of 1845, and the Swiss treaty of 1850 rallied Jews around a common cause. When large numbers of immigrants flocked to America during the mid-nineteenth century, organization once again became of prime concern to American Jews. The Jews were scattered in small communities throughout the country. They faced the problems of educating their children, of providing various social services

and of adopting some organizational structure. Only through the joint efforts of all Jews could such challenges in America be properly resolved. Union among American Israelites was a sound beginning reasoned Isaac Leeser.

The first volume of the Occident in 1843 contained several articles pleading for union among American Jews. In these articles, Leeser stressed the urgent need for small congregations to join themselves together in larger unions.

> "It is an evil certainly that, in small communities especially, Israelites do not unite to form one large respectable Synagogue, in place of weakening their strength and wasting means uselessly in keeping up separate establishments for the Portuguese, German, and Polish customs." 38

Leeser desired to promote authoritative observances that would result in Orthodox traditions.

In 1841, a few years before the appearance of the Occident, Leeser had met at the request of Rabbi Louis Solomon of Rodef Shalom of Philadelphia for the purpose of uniting American Jews. Three congregations participated: Mikveh Israel, Rodeph Shalom and Beth-El, all of Philadelphia. In that meeting Lewis Allen, Esq., President of Mikveh Israel presided and Henry Cohen, treasurer of Beth Israel was elected secretary of the proceedings. The members resolved the following:

> "That a committee be appointed to consider the propriety of endeavoring to establish a plan of religious union of different congregations of America, and that they report a plan for obtaining the views of the several congregations as to such a union, and such other matters as may be thought necessary to carry the union into effect, and that the plan submitted by Rev. Messrs. Salomon and Leeser, be referred to that committee."39

At a later meeting held on July 18, 1841, at the Masonic Hall, the

plan agreed upon by the committee was placed before the assembled members. The preamble of the plan read as follows:

> "The Israelites of Philadelphia, in common with their brethren in other places of America, have long since been alive to the many evils under which they labour in the great downfall of religious observance, and the want of proper religious education among them. But deeming it their duty to leave no means untried to counteract the deplorable state of want of proper observance, and to promote a due knowledge of the blessed religion they have received from their fathers, they have resolved to propose a union of all Israelites residing in America, to effect by a common and united effort, that which would evidently be beyond the power of accomplishing by any one of the small congregations in which the Israelites of this country are divided; they therefore offer the following suggestions, which they hope will forward greatly the desired result; in, first, establishing a competent ecclesiastical authority, agreeably to the injunction of the law in Deut. xvi. 18: 'Judges and officers shalt thou appoint for thyself in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee throughout thy tribes;' secondly, by establishing schools for general and religious education under Jewish superintendence, as commanded in Deut. vi. 7: 'And thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children;' and thirdly, by promoting harmony and a concert of action among all their brethren scattered over the western hemisphere, in accordance with the lofty aspiration of the Psalmist, who says (cxxxiii. 1): 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.' With these views the committee recommend the adoption of the following rules and regulations for the government and action of the Israelites in America."[40]

This plan attempted to establish some ecclesiastical authority to further education and to unite all Jews scattered throughout the country. Furthermore, one can see that this plan desired to arbitrate any problems arising from any differences among the various congregations in the country. The suggestions of this meeting were sent to all congregations,

who were invited to a national meeting.

Isaac Leeser went to New York to lay the foundations for the national meeting. The parnas of Shearith Israel of New York, then the strongest congregation, was invited to participate in the plan for union. Since the Ashkenazi congregations were in the majority, the parnas refused the invitation feeling that the Sephardic congregations would be very much in the minority. The Reform congregations also showed no interest. Beth Elohim of Charleston voted against the whole scheme in a resolution it passed which denied "all conventions, founded or created for the establishment of any ecclesiastical authority whatever....are alien to the spirit and genius of the age in which we live, and are wholly inconsistent with the spirit of American Liberty". [41] The plan ended in a complete failure, yet Isaac Leeser refused to relent in his crusade for a union among all Jewish congregations.

A second attempt was soon made; however, this time with the unexpected assistance of Isaac M. Wise. Wise promised to support Leeser in the idea of unity. Wise wrote a letter to Leeser which was printed in the Occident.

> "Exercise all your influence on your friends and acquaintances, to bring together all men of zeal and piety, of wisdom and knowledge, to consider what should be done for the union, welfare and progress of Israel." [42]

Wise also called upon some of his friends, Lilienthal, Kohlmayer, Merzbacher, Isaacs, and Felsenheld, to participate in the forthcoming meeting to gather on the second day of Iyar, 5609 (1849). Leeser was naturally most pleased with Wise's support for the project. Wise thought Philadelphia a suitable city for the meeting; Leeser preferred New York since the majority of Jews lived in that city. Yet, Leeser was anxious to

gather in any city as long as an assembly to discuss union would meet in the near future.

Wise had named several whom he expected would join the proposed plan for union. Rev. Isaacs wrote Leeser that he would be anxious to join the proceedings. There was no other way in Isaac's opinion to improve religious piety, to train a ministry, and to educate our children than through such a meeting. Isaacs realized that differences would ensue, yet he hoped that the principles and aims of the meeting would elevate all the assembled members into compromising for the sake of Israel.[43]

Leeser realized that many of his orthodox colleagues were hesitant in joining the proposed plan since Wise was known to be a radical. Leeser assured his colleagues and readers that such an assembly would not support radical projects within Judaism. Leeser wrote:

> "We want union to glorify the law; we want it to elevate the character of Judaism; but should our project be made use of to work injury to the good cause, we pledge our word before its consummation, that we will oppose it with all the energy which we are capable of, and stand aloof from all union with those who would bring evil and dissension into the assembly of God-fearing Israelites."[44]

Leeser advised his readers that the assembly would safeguard the rights of all participants.

> "No legislative action is to be attempted with our consent; all resolves are to be merely advisory, neither obligatory on the members themselves nor the congregations they represent; it is to retard the spirit of wild reform with which many individuals from abroad and at home, are imbued, and to give, as far as a united effort can succeed in so doing, the spirit of the age a wholesome direction."[45]

Wise admitted he was a reformer, but he was purposely unclear on his

position on halachic dogma. Leeser had outlined the limits of the assembly; but many were apprehensive about Wise's limits. Wise assured his colleagues that "Reform questions of synagogues shall only then be discussed, if petitions of congregations bring the subject fairly before the same".[46]

Wise wrote in the Occident on his position with regard to reform. He said:

> "I am a reformer, as much so as our age requires; because I am convinced that none can stop the stream of time, none can check the swift wheels of age; but I have always the Halacha for my basis; I never sanction a reform against the Din. I am a reformer, if the people long for it, but then I seek to direct the public mind on the path of the Din; but I never urge my principles upon another, nor do I commence to start a reform in a synagogue."[47]

Leeser's colleagues were not relieved by Wise's remarks on reform. How could any Orthodox leader who devoted his entire life's work to promote faithful adherence to tradition, meet with a man whose primary aim was to destroy what the traditionalists hoped to preserve? Leeser was temporarily willing to overlook Wise's radical ideas in order to create a union of both the traditional and more radical factions. Thus, Leeser pleaded with his colleagues to come forward and join in the forthcoming proceedings.

In America, there was no competent religious authority to rule on any halachic questions existing in congregations or with any ministers. Nor was there any authority who could judge the qualifications of the candidates for the ministry. Leeser thought that the Chief Rabbi in England would not answer a minister but would respond to questions submitted by a congregation.[48] But, Leeser knew that such procedures took

time before an answer would be received from abroad. A competent central religious authority in America would solve many problems. Examinations of ministers could properly be administered, education of all Jewish children could be undertaken, and a trained ministry in America would strengthen Judaism.

The final date for the assembly was set by Wise and Leeser for June, 1849. Both men exerted great efforts to make the assembly a success. Leeser wrote numerous articles about the assembly; Wise preached countless sermons in various American cities. Instead of the original plan of holding the meeting just for ministers, Leeser and Wise decided to include both rabbis and lay leaders. The planners sent a circular out to the congregations who were most likely to join the meeting in June. Wise and Leeser decided to wait until twenty congregations agreed to send delegates.

In May, 1849 an article appeared in the Occident under the title, "Shall We Meet?" Leeser expressed his personal sadness over the response shown by the American Jewish congregations to the proposed assembly the following month. Only five congregations had elected delegates since the format of the conference had been changed. Leeser was naturally most disappointed over such a poor reception. Leeser wrote:

> "But we cannot disguise the fact that the proposal has been received with less enthusiasm than its importance deserves, and so far as appearances go, there seems not much probability that the convention can meet at as early date as the second week in June, unless the adhesion of the yet not heard from congregations should come in much faster than we have any right at present to expect."[49]

The required responses from other congregations never came, much to

Wise's and Leeser's disappointment. The proposed assembly seemed doomed to defeat. Leeser refused to give up all hope for an eventual meeting. Three other congregations responded after Leeser's May article; but the required number was still lacking. Leeser admitted defeat in the June issue of his magazine; yet he still anticipated success.[50] The meeting scheduled for the eleventh of June was subsequently postponed; but the assembly never convened in the future.

Isaac Leeser was unaware that a new society, called the Society of the Friends of Light, had organized in America. All faiths were accepted into the Society. Wise had been given an honorary membership in the Society, having corresponded with the Society since its inception.[51] The general purpose of the Society seemed directed at removing all boundaries between the world religions. The Society gathered many members who had experienced persecution in Europe. Many liberals joined the Society, especially since its establishment came immediately after the liberal revolutions of 1848.[52] Those who were favorable to the synagogal union lost interest after many congregations who either had designated delegates or promised to, were no longer interested in the assembly. Only one congregation in New York, Shaaray Tefila, under the leadership of Rev. Isaacs actually responded to Leeser and Wise's circular.[53] Those who strongly favored the proposed assembly stood firm. The assembly was vital to American Judaism.

The Society of the Friends of Light was responsible for the proposed assembly's failure. Wise remarked about the sudden change of mood that swept over so many people. "Enthusiasm was diverted to and all attention turned towards this society, instead of being given to the movement for congregational union."[54] Wise thought that many of the members in the

Society were members bent on destroying Judaism. Wise found all attempts to advance the proposed assembly blocked. People he contacted favored the Society for the present. Soon Wise himself knew the assembly was doomed to failure.

Both Leeser and Wise were disappointed over the eventual fate of the assembly. Yet, while Wise directed further energies henceforth to the required changes necessary for a thorough reform in Judaism, Isaac Leeser still anticipated success for the planned assembly. It is a sad commentary on American Judaism that such dynamic individuals as Wise and Leeser could not have continued their efforts along a common front.

Leeser was greatly annoyed by an article printed in the Asmonean by Dr. Wise on the Union of American Jews. Wise had assumed responsibility for the failure of the assembly; but he had also taken the full credit for the concept which Leeser had originated several years before Wise. Wise lamented the plan's collapse: "Therefore, I left last year my solitary closet for a short moment, to call on my brethren earnestly and solemnly to unite for the accomplishment of our holy mission, to be strictly combined in one sacred cause."[55] Leeser was personally hurt by Wise's assertions. Leeser fought onward: "Judaism has but one motto in America, and this is Advance!"[56]

The battle for synagogal unity was not over for Isaac Leeser. Leeser expressed his eagerness to join with any men whose energies were directed to such a union. Leeser indicated the purpose of such a meeting:

> "(a) Education in its fullest sense; (b) Diffusion of good books among all classes; (c) The establishment of a respectable and respected ecclesiastical authority; (d) The institution of hospitals in some central position, where the suffering Israelite might

> be received and tended by his own fellow believers."[57]

Leeser continued his pleas for union in numerous editorials appearing in the Occident.

While Leeser worked for union, Wise soon prepared for another assembly. This was the third attempt at a conference. Leeser and his Orthodox colleagues were indeed sceptical of this assembly. Fearing that the Cleveland Assembly was proposed for the adulation of Reform, Orthodox leaders refrained from attending the 1855 assembly. The Cleveland assembly met on the seventeenth of October, although the assembly was a success; Leeser's objectives were not considered at the meeting. Reform had gained a foothold in America; henceforth Leeser and his colleagues fought a losing battle against Reform. The delegates consisted entirely of Reformers; Isaac Leeser was the only exception. Wise's circular for the assembly in Cleveland was entitled Sholom Al Yisroel (Peace be Unto Israel). The circular read as follows:

> "In the name of Israel's God and Israel's religion the ministers and delegates of the Israelitish congregations are respectfully requested to assemble in a conference, to take place the seventeenth day of October, 5616 A.M., in the city of Cleveland, Ohio, to deliberate on the following points:
>
> 1. The articles of Union of American Israel in theory and practice.
>
> 2. A plan to organize a regular synod, consisting of delegates chosen by the congregations and societies, whose plans, privileges, and duties shall be defined, to be sent to the several congregations for their approbation.
>
> 3. To discuss and refer to a committee a plan for a Minhag America, to be reported to the synod at its first session.
>
> 4. A plan for scholastic education in the lower and higher branches of learning.
>
> 5. Other propositions either sent in by congregations, or made by the ministers and delegates at the conference.
>
> By order of the American Rabbis.
>
> Rev. Drs. Cohn, of Albany;
> Guenzburg, of Baltimore;
> Hochheimer, of Baltimore;
> Illowy, of St. Louis;

Kalisch, of Cleveland;
Lilienthal, of Cincinnati;
Merzbacher, of New York;
Rothenheim, of Cincinnati;
Wise, of Cincinnati.
Isaac M. Wise, Corresponding Secretary."[58]

Both the Reformers and Traditionalists were apprehensive about uniting into an ecclesiastical body. The Orthodox rabbis veered away from any such gathering. Illowy refused to meet with Wise, although he signed the original circular. Abraham Rice who adhered to strict Sabbath observance boycotted the conference. While the Orthodox leaders refused to attend the Cleveland Conference, the Reform leaders were unwilling to tolerate Wise's compromises with the Traditionalists.[59] When the assembly met, Wise was elected chairman; Dr. Elkan Cohn, the minister of Anshe Emeth, Albany, New York, became vice-chairman, and Lilienthal the secretary.[60] The proceedings were conducted in German.

Leeser expressed great reticence about attending the conference, fearing that the direction the assembly would decide to follow was as yet unclear. Leeser appeared at the Cleveland Assembly, but took no part in the conference until the assembly had determined the basic guidelines for future assemblies. Leeser claimed that although only an observer, he served in a three-fold capacity. Leeser was a delegate from the Portuguese congregation in Richmond; he was the oldest minister in America; and he was witnessing the assembly as the editor of the oldest magazine in America.[61] Since the rabbis present were all Reformers, Leeser abstained from the assembly. Dr. Wise began the assembly by asserting that a Jew could not be ruled out of Judaism regardless of the number of prayers one recited or whether the individual observed the second day of the festivals or the synagogue played an organ on the Sab-

bath.[62] Dr. Wise read a paper suggesting several basic principles which were fundamental to achieving any progress at the meeting. The conference adopted the following platform:

"1. The first conference of American Rabbins acknowledge the Bible which we have received from our fathers as the revealed word of God, given to us by divine inspiration.

2. ...the Talmud contains the logical and legal development of the Holy Scriptures, and that its decisions must guide us in all matters of practice and duty.

3. ...this conference and all future Synods will act according to these principles.

4. ...the illiberal assertions contained in the Talmud are not of the kind referred to, and have no binding force on us."[63]

The members must have ignored the inherent contradictions between the second and fourth principles. Leeser was overjoyed with these principles, announcing that he was then ready to join the assembly as a member. Leeser claimed that had Wise's principles been known beforehand, more Orthodox leaders would have participated in the assembly. Leeser proposed that the assembly be adjourned at once so that Wise's proposals could be publicized and another assembly be convened the following summer. Leeser stated that the seventeenth of October inaugurated a day of joy for Israel "if all Jews would adopt in sincerity the Bible as the inspired word of God and the Talmud as indicating the rule of life by which they would be governed". The first clause was unanimously adopted by the members. The second received more careful scrutiny. The first day of the conference ended after all members participated in the afternoon and evening service.

When the conference convened the following afternoon, Leeser offered a resolution of his own on the second principle. Leeser's proposal read: "That it is the opinion and conviction of this conference, that the Talmud

contains the divine tradition given to Moses, and that all Israelites must decide all questions according to its decision."[65] In addition, Leeser urged that the words "orthodoxy" and "reform" be changed to "catholic" and "Reformed Israelites". Leeser's motion did not meet with unanimous approval. After a long discussion, a compromise was reached. The final form read: "The Talmud contains the traditional, logical, and legal exposition of the sacred Scriptures."[66] Leeser agreed to the final form of the principle with the mental reservation that the word "traditional" implied divine communications. Since Leeser had another commitment in Philadelphia, he excused himself from the assembly and left confident that his mission was a success.

Isaac Leeser left the Cleveland Conference confident that a solid base had been laid for union among American Jews. Wise was as jubilant as Leeser. Wise felt that he had won a major victory for himself. Now he had established himself as the leader of a United Israel.

But the following day the conference reconvened and approved a number of resolutions which contradicted some of the original principles. When Leeser reached New York, he discovered while reading the Cleveland paper that the assembly was still in session. Wise urged the assembly to call a regular synod, to appoint a committee to establish a uniform liturgy and another to organize Zion Collegiate Associations in all cities of the United States for the children's high school education. Wise and his colleagues condemned all day schools, recommending public schools with the addition of a supplementary religious school education.[67]

Leeser was greatly disturbed to learn that the assembly had adopted a new prayerbook, Minhag America, which deleted certain prayers from the traditional prayerbook. The new Minhag America had removed all referen-

ces to a personal messiah, to the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, and to all prayers for sacrifices. Although Isaac Leeser was distressed over these sudden events, he was confident of the final results. He wrote after leaving the assembly:

> "This much, however, I must say, that if the gentlemen I met last week are honest in their attachment to the Bible and Talmud, their reform must be harmless, since they can thus introduce nothing for which they cannot present to the world reasons based upon authority."[68]

Unity was the purpose but not the effect of the conference. Illowy noted Wise's various contradictions and urged Wise to practice what he preached. Illowy vocalized the Orthodox position in America. On the Reform side, Einhorn and his colleagues felt that Wise had no right to compromise with the Orthodox and their talmudic views on Judaism. Einhorn desired to remove any mention of divine authority while Wise and Lilienthal were not such extreme Reformers. Wise intended to make only gradual reforms.

Leeser wanted the efforts continued. When would the next conference be held? When would the promised synod commence? Leeser realized that so far only an initial step had been taken. Possibly a world conference would be necessary to save Judaism. There were sufficient learned men who in council could deliberate on the state of Israel as it now exists.

> "Such an assembly, voluntarily come together from different parts of the world, would have a powerful influence to silence agitation on the one hand, and to satisfy the conscience on the other; and there could be no political object at the bottom of convoking such a meeting, as was the case with the Sanhedrin which met under Napoleon I.; nor could either reformers or their opponents say, that the object of the members was to crush inquiry, since the very

> assembling could prove that they meant to subject all the points at issue to the only test feasible among us, Scripture and Tradition."[69]

The Cleveland Conference achieved exactly the opposite of what its leaders envisioned. The two groups, the Orthodox and Reform leaders, were now hopelessly divided beyond reconciliations. While Wise found his Reform colleagues split within the Reform movement, Leeser's Orthodox friends were equally divided. There was no possibility of compromise. Isaac Leeser had advocated a system of conciliation, compromise and appeasement with reform, but after learning of Wise's deliberate intentions at the assembly, henceforth, Leeser engaged in a relentless war against reform. Progressive Judaism was now "progressive wickedness".[70] Such wickedness Leeser wanted to blot out whenever possible. Leeser prayed that Orthodoxy might gain deliverance from the Reformers.

Leeser was persistent about forming a union, but after the schism with Reform, he advocated a union with the traditional leaders. Leeser still hoped that the Reformers might join the traditional union, but the voting power would be withheld from the Reformers.[71] The Reform movement gained strength in spite of Leeser's attempts against it. Leeser extended himself beyond normal bounds in the hope of forming some union among American Jews. He pleaded for union even when little hope existed for it.[72]

The Orthodox union became a reality with the formation of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites in 1859. A desire for religious union was not the reason for this organization, but it was a result of external forces. The Mortara case had created some stir within Jewish circles.[73] The Board of Delegates hoped to address itself to the sudden

hostility that existed against Jews at this time. The Board of Delegates hoped Reform would join them in a united effort against the recent Jewish hostility. However, Wise refused to become a part of the organization. None of the Reformers were willing to participate in the organization.

> "The Board might have survived none the less had Wise been willing to rise above his personal animosity and cooperate with Leeser. He, after all, controlled the policies of numerous congregations in the mid-West and South; their adherence would have strengthened the Board so greatly that Einhorn and fellow radicals could not have remained outside the fold. But Wise was stubborn and declared his opposition from the first. The traditionalists, for their part, could not conteract the opposition of both radical and moderate reformers. Although it survived for a number of years, the Board of Delegates thus never had a fair opportunity to develop its program and demonstrate its effectiveness."[74]

Isaac Leeser became the Vice-president of the Board, serving in this position the rest of his life. While Leeser had hoped for religious unity among American Jews, nothing resulted from his persistent efforts. To the very end of his life, Leeser bemoaned the lack of religious unity among American Jews, or even within the Orthodox camp. Leeser wrote:

> "But we have written, spoken, and taught almost in vain; — the sluggishness of many orthodox teachers, as they call themselves, has been the rock against which our efforts have been wrecked."[75]

Leeser complained that there was not even one leader among the Orthodox who had national qualifications. Since the men did not want Leeser, he was only too glad to absent himself. Leeser however, would not dismiss the urgent problem. He wrote: "But let them labor, let then throw aside the official dignified retirement in which they love to indulge, and meet

the question boldly and energetically, as becomes men who have their faith." [76] Yet, with all of Leeser's prodding, the Orthodox rabbis refused to have anything to do with such a union. The last attempts at union fell on deaf ears. While the Orthodox were unable to organize themselves, Wise and his colleagues grew increasingly stronger. Reform was not to be overthrown; the movement was permanently entrenched in America.

While Isaac Leeser was Orthodox, he believed in certain reforms that would bring dignity and decorum into the service and were in consonance with the Bible and the Talmud. Leeser wanted beautiful synagogues that would enhance the glorification of God, but "we detest a church-going religion which begins with the priest and which ends in sound, and nothing but sound." [77] Leeser argued that if music and orations are the primary reasons for assemblying for worship, then the most accomplished musicians and preachers should be hired. [78] Leeser stated emphatically:

> "But this is not Judaism, and it is with this
> only with which we have anything to do.
> Judaism is, or should be, a religion of feeling;
> and if it be not this, it is nothing at all,
> it is a mockery." [79]

Leeser had positive proposals which he suggested be adopted in all synagogues. Leeser favored the Sephardic ritual, feeling that this ritual would unite the congregations in America. Although Leeser had originally favored the Ashkenazi ritual, he changed his mind when he first lived in Richmond, Virginia. Leeser found the Sephardic ritual attuned to the spirit of Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the prayers found in the prayer book were not prolonged, thus the service would not tax the patience of the congregation. In the Sephardic ritual the piyutim were

removed while the Ashkenazic ritual still contained these poetic insertions.

Leeser advocated certain constructive reforms which were compatible with tradition, yet they were improvements in the synagogue service. Leeser pleaded for the abolition of all money-offerings in the synagogue on all Sabbaths and holy days. Leeser strongly recommended the following rules in the service:

> a. "A punctual presence of all worshippers at the time appointed for the commencement of prayers.
> b. Not to permit anyone, whether Israelite or gentile visitor, to quit the Synagogue before the meeting is over.
> c. Not to allow any conversation or any sort during prayers, reading of the law and prophets, or during the sermon.
> d. Not to allow any children to brought in who are too young or unruly to remain during the whole time of worship."[81]

Leeser suggested that all synagogue administration follow democratic lines. All meetings and decisions of the congregation should adhere to the voice of the majority. Party affiliations have no place in the administration of the synagogue.[82]

Toward the end of his life, Leeser confessed that with all his opposition to Reform, his espousals fell on deaf ears. Leeser lamented toward the end of his editorial career:

> "No one more than the humble writer of this is cognizant of the deplorable defection now prevailing in most civilized countries within the circle of Judaism; no one, perhaps, has more energetically contended against it than he has done; no one has watched with more painful interest the greater and greater spread of the erroneous doctrines which are gradually moving with giant strides, into every direction; nay, we confess that in proportion as our earnest warnings have been uttered has been the appa-

> rent triumphant advance of what we honestly deem both pernicious and unauthorized."[83]

When Isaac Leeser's last months on earth were fast approaching, he enunciated once more the principles which he had contended throughout his life.

> "Let others follow the idols of the hour, and quit the fold where our people so long found security, we are for Judaism, that brave old stock of Heaven's own planting; we are for orthodoxy, the true exposition of the Word of God; we are for the law as it was given to us from Sinai; we are for all the hopes of our race, trusting in its regeneration, in the restoration of the temple, the rebuilding of the altar, and in the reign of universal peace only and alone, under the benficient sway of Mashiach ben David, in whose days the redemption of Israel and the salvation of mankind will be accomplished, but not until then."[84]

FOOTNOTES

1 Henry Englander "Isaac Leeser", Central Conference of American Rabbis, Vol. XXVIII; 1918. Bachrach Press, p. 211.

2 Isaac Leeser, Ed., The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, (Philadelphia) Vol. 1, No. 12; March, 1844. pp. 602-603.

3 Ibid., Vol. IX, No. 4; July, 1851. p. 212.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 6; September, 1843. pp. 253-254.

6 Ibid., Vol. IX, No. 4; July, 1851. p. 214.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 4; July, 1843. p. 205.

9 Ibid., pp. 205-206.

10 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 5; August, 1843. pp. 253-254.

11 Ibid., Vol. IX, No. 4; July, 1851. pp. 209-210.

12 Ibid., p. 219.

13 Ibid., p. 221.

14 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 7; October, 1844. p. 318.

15 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 9; December, 1844. p. 414.

16 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 6; September, 1844. p. 304.

17 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 8; November, 1844. p. 361.

18 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 8; November, 1845. p. 400.

19 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 8; November, 1844. p. 364.

20 Ibid.,

21 Ibid., p. 370.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 10; January, 1845. p. 464.

24 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 1; April, 1854. p. 4.

25 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 3; June, 1854. pp. 126-127.

26 Ibid., p. 127.

27 Ibid., p. 128.

28 Ibid., p. 129.

29 Ibid., p. 132.

30 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 4; July, 1854. p. 169.

31 Ibid., p. 170.

32 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 5; August, 1854. p. 238.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 237.

35 Ibid., p. 240.

36 Ibid., pp. 242-243.

37 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 7; October, 1854. pp. 329-338.

38 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 10; January, 1844. p. 458.

39 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 4; July, 1845. p. 175.

40 Ibid., p. 176.

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CHAPTER VII

ISAAC LEESER IN RETROSPECT

If men appraised the tangible achievements of Isaac Leeser, the report would convey a picture of tragedy. Few of his endeavors were long range successes. Shortly after Leeser's death, the Occident ceased further publication. Maimonides College, Leeser's dream project, closed its doors some years after his death. Leeser's attacks against Reform were blunted and powerful. Reform and conservative movements emerged to challenge orthodoxy. Yet Isaac Leeser was a pioneer for American Judaism. He pioneered in founding the first Jewish Publication Society in America, which though unsuccessful during his lifetime, was subsequently reestablished as a going concern. He established foster homes, literary guilds, asylums and numerous associations to promote the cause of the poor. Although many of Leeser's endeavors were not permanent successes, his pioneering efforts significantly furthered Judaism in America during the nineteenth century. He laid the foundations for the achievements of those who followed. Leeser's greatest achievement was his translation of the Bible into English. All in all, we owe a great debt to Isaac Leeser. Few really understood the inner drives, motivations, goals and strivings of Isaac Leeser's unique personality.

In Leeser's early childhood, he experienced strict conformity to Jewish observances. The orthodox patterns of Judaism were firmly implanted within him by his grandmother and Rabbi Sutro. They implanted the orthodox doctrines within him even while Europe was undergoing reforms. Although Reform was founded in Germany during Leeser's youth, his own contacts were almost exclusively with orthodox advocates.

Only the later contact with Reform caused Leeser any problem, but by then, his committment to traditional Judaism was absolute.

Leeser never received and extensive education in Germany. His secular and religious education were not intense enough to satisfy his probing mind. Throughout his life he spoke about the inadequacy of his education. Leeser never earned the doctor's degree. he felt himself lacking in talmudic knowledge and also in secular studies. This inferiority preoccupied him throughout his life. He apologized for this deficiency on several occasions. In America, he found his position very tenuous at first. However, once his reputation was secured, titles and degrees were irrelevant. Leeser was not an ordained minister nor did he hold a doctor's degree. During his life, he was always conscious of his educational deficiencies.

Leeser came to America intent on a career in commerce, yet his real interest directed him toward studying and learning. Leeser had a keen mind. He quickly mastered English and presented a defense of the Jewish cause in the local paper. Whether Leeser enjoyed his commercial pursuits with his uncle or not we do not know. However, his article quickly brought him to the attention of Mikveh Israel. During the five years Leeser remained with his uncle, his love of Judaism intensified. Leeser was never destined for commercial pursuits. When the first opportunity came to defend Judaism, Leeser was most eager. Whether he hoped to leave his uncle's employ and labor on behalf of Jews, will never be resolved. Leeser was cautious. Only when the congregation invited him, did he accept the offer.

Leeser assumed his position in Philadelphia in 1829. Philadelphia was a community unlike any he had previously known. In Germany, Isaac

Leeser grew up within the middle class. He came into contact with people who appreciated learning and knowledge. Yet, wealth was something new for Isaac Leeser. Once Leeser arrived in America, he lived with an uncle who possessed wealth and social position in Richmond. When he moved to Philadelphia, Isaac Leeser became part of a social elite. His daily activities brought him into contact with the social elite. Yet his contact with the prominent names of the social registry was solely for religious or social purposes. Leeser was the hazan of Mikveh Israel; thus he came into social contact with them. Many became life-long friends of his.

Philadelphia was the center of nineteenth century life in America. It was in Philadelphia where Leeser spent the rest of his life. He soon adopted many of the values of the social elite of Philadelphia. However, there was a tension within Isaac Leeser. On the one hand, Leeser scolded his congregation for the sentiments they held, while on the other hand, he felt very comfortable with these prominent social families. Though he was never wealthy himself, he came into constant contact with the prominent establishment of Philadelphia. Yet, Isaac Leeser was also the champion of the poor. Leeser took their causes to heart. He chastized the rich, yet was the leader of the poor. He felt at home in Philadelphia and gained the respect of both social groups.

In Germany, the seeds of learning had been planted within him. His ardent support of orthodoxy was also developed during his early youth. Leeser grew up within very restricted horizons. His patterns of life were clearly imprinted within him before he came to America. America opened new horizons for Isaac Leeser. But the expanding religious horizons seemed too much for Leeser. Leeser struggled gallantly to return

American Jews to orthodoxy and to the sentiments of the closed society he had known in Germany. But, American Jews were not willing to turn back.

Isaac Leeser was a conservative. His conservative sentiments were early manifested in Germany through his orthodox religious practices. Liberal sentiments were most common during this period in Germany. Equality and freedom for all spread quickly. The older guard of German patriots feared any change, however slight. Leeser's family feared that change would harm their status and their security as Jews. Thus, Leeser grew up among conservatives. Philadelphia harbored similar sentiments, yet the reasons were different. Philadelphia was conservative since the majority of the population were wealthy merchants who desired to maintain the status quo. Isaac Leeser fit into the conservative pattern of Philadelphia. However, his conservatism was thoroughly idealistic, untainted by material considerations.

Philadelphia was home for Isaac Leeser. Philadelphia had the finest cultural advantages of any city in America. Men of learning were drawn to the city. Isaac Leeser was at home in this academic setting. The financial world was another dimension of Philadelphia. Men of wealth flocked to this city. Leeser entered this circle also, not as a businessman but as a religious leader of men of wealth.

Soon anything outside of New England became provincial; the inhabitants were uncultured and irreligious, and the West required education, culture, and educational assistance from Philadelphia, the great center of the East. Philadelphia was the hub of all culture in the nineteenth century. Spokes like a wheel emanated from this cultural center, reaching the most remote regions of the country. Whenever Leeser traveled

to these remote places, he brought religious enlightenment. Leeser never expressed his sentiments about the West, although it seemed clear that he considered the West uncultured and uneducated when compared to Philadelphia.

Isaac Leeser was a unique personality. He was short in stature and stout in frame. He wore horn-rimmed eye glasses. His illness in 1834 left his face pockmarked. Leeser was not a handsome man. He remained a bachelor throughout his life. He was a lonely man, feeling inferior because of his lack of a formal education. He absorbed himself in Judaism and Jewish causes. Leeser was a pleasant person. He was intelligent, educating himself on many topics. His religious fervor was traditionally oriented. Judaism must follow the patterns established since Biblical times. He championed the causes of the needy even at the expense of his wealthy friends in Philadelphia. When Isaac Leeser believed in a cause, he fought for it with every fibre of his being. His moral character was beyond reproach. Money was unimportant for Leeser. It served only as a means to attain a meagre livelihood. Other things interested him more. Although at times he lamented over his frugal existence, he cared little for monetary gain. His sole concern was for the survival of his people, Israel. Leeser gained the respect of the poor because he lived so plainly. He attained respect from the rich because he symbolized an ethical human being who would not compromise his high standards for monetary advantages. Leeser was both conservative and culturally within the scope of the elite.

When Isaac Leeser came from Richmond to Philadelphia, his pursuits in business were quickly abandoned for his real interest: the survival and spiritual growth of Jews and Judaism. Leeser was interested in the

individual and his attaining salvation. The external world was unimportant to him. This became Leeser's primary concern once he came to Philadelphia. All his energies were directed toward this cause. Political, social and economic problems which had no effect on Jews or Judaism were of no interest to Isaac Leeser. Even the Civil War was ignored by Leeser. Though the Civil War affected Jews in the North and South, he felt it was not a major issue for Judaism. When Jews in Palestine, China, and Europe were endangered, Leeser used the Occident to voice his consternation and concern in these matters.

Through his desire to further Judaism, Leeser realized that American Jews were insufficiently schooled in their faith. Thus, Leeser worked tirelessly to produce the necessary pamphlets, articles, books, schools, teachers and ministers to properly educate all Jewish children throughout America. The sermon was another instrument of education. Those who gained their instruction through Leeser's discourses could learn about Judaism and find salvation through his oral messages. He disseminated much information in the pages of the Occident. Why was education so important to Leeser? Leeser was convinced that only through education could Jews survive. Jews had always distinguished themselves as an educated elite and Leeser knew that such must be true for all Jews living in the West. Jewish education would enlighten those areas where darkness prevailed. Education would further unite Jews throughout America. But, Leeser felt that education was the only means by which an individual could attain salvation. Rich and poor were all able to learn about Judaism. There were no prerequisites, no monetary requirements, only an intense interest in a knowledge of God. It was available for everyone. Leeser was determined to make it just that

simple. All his energies were exerted toward that goal.

While Isaac Leeser labored to improve Jewish education, he looked upon the Reform movement as a threat to Judaism. Leeser was orthodox in his religious practices. Philadelphia and his homeland in Germany harbored conservative sentiments. Progressive reforms were contrary to Leeser's strict adherence to the Biblical injunctions, and in sharp contrast to the established patterns of his Eastern life in Philadelphia. Why should anyone want to change what had been in existence for centuries? Man had attained individual salvation from the previous religious patterns in existence since Biblical times. Were present reforms in Judaism able to improve on a religious system that had been most satisfactory for so long? Leeser thought not. Thus, reform must be attacked at all cost. At every opportunity, Leeser took the reformers to task; however, his battle was in vain. Isaac M. Wise , Leeser's most ardent opponent, well summed up the career of this remarkable man, whose love for his faith was as intense as his antagonism to reform, when he wrote,

> "He was an active laborer in the province of Jewish literature, zealous advocate and expounder of Judaism, untiring in his efforts to benefit the cause of Israel; honest and consistent to the last day of his life.... He was the banner bearer of American Jewish conservatism. All the rest of their leaders are of local importance only, while he, by his literary efforts, his travel, his numerous acquaintances, his unfeigned attachment to his cause and his consistency, had a widespread influence. We know of no man in America who will replace Isaac Leeser in the orthodox camp."

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