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THE ABOLITIONISTS AND THE JEWS

By LOUIS RUCHAMES

The Abolitionists appear in a most unflattering guise in Bertram W. Korn's study of *American Jewry and the Civil War*,¹ and in his essay on "Isaac Mayer Wise on the Civil War."² Admittedly uncompromising in their zeal for Negro rights, the Abolitionists are pictured as power-hungry politicians, heedless of the welfare of minority groups other than Negroes, and guilty of prejudice and discriminatory acts toward foreigners and Jews.

The primary source of Doctor Korn's views is Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, whose political and economic conservatism, and sympathy for the platform of the Democratic party, blinded him to most that was laudable in the strivings of the leaders of the anti-slavery movement. Although Doctor Korn acknowledges Rabbi Wise's prejudices,³ he, nonetheless, accepts, with almost no questioning, the latter's facts, opinions and conclusions, and adds a few items of his own. The purpose of this study is to indicate the errors in Doctor Korn's and Rabbi Wise's views and to adduce facts which suggest a portrait quite different from that which has hitherto been presented. It is based upon an examination of the biographies, writings and speeches of such outstanding Abolitionists and anti-slavery leaders as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson,

¹ Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951).

² *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. XX (1947), pp. 635-658.

³ See B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 289, note 92.

and Lydia Maria Child, and a study of *The Liberator*, and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the two best known Abolitionist newspapers of their day. This study is confined, for the most part, to the Massachusetts anti-slavery men, who were the primary targets of Rabbi Wise's and, to a lesser extent, Doctor Korn's censure.

What stands out most prominently in the lives of the Abolitionists is their love of humanity, their hatred of oppression and discrimination of every kind, their sympathy with the downtrodden and the oppressed, and their unswerving devotion to equal rights for all men. Their efforts were concentrated upon helping the free Negro and the slave, for these were the most oppressed elements of the population of their day; but their devotion to equal rights extended also to the Jew, the foreigner and members of other minority groups. Although one sometimes finds, in their letters and other writings, expressions of racial stereotypes and prejudices, concerning both Negroes and Jews, these are infrequent and atypical, and do not affect their devotion to equal rights for Negroes and Jews. The basic philosophy of the Abolitionists was set forth by William Lloyd Garrison, in a sonnet which he wrote on December 10, 1840, on his thirty-fifth birthday.

O! not for Afric's sons alone I plead,
Or her descendants; but for all who sigh
In servile chains, whate'er their caste or creed:
They not in vain to Heaven send up their cry;
For all mankind from bondage shall be freed,
And from the earth be chased all forms of tyranny.⁴

Twenty five years later, when it was asserted that the Abolitionists had been interested only in the welfare of the Negro, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* commented:

⁴ Reprinted in *William Lloyd Garrison: Told by His Children* (New York, 1885), vol. II, p. 433.

It was not . . . "for the devastated Negro's sake" alone, but for the sake of humanity, white as well as black, and in the interest of freedom and free government universally, that abolitionists of our school sought by peaceful means to destroy a pro-slavery union.⁵

This portrait differs markedly from that presented by Doctor Korn and Rabbi Wise, where the Abolitionists appear as "politicians bent on securing power,"⁶ ethically inconsistent, indifferent to the fate of Jews and foreigners, indeed, guilty of prejudice and discriminatory acts toward these minority groups. In order to ascertain the truth, let us examine the most important elements of the latter picture. These seem to be the following: the responsibility of the Abolitionists for the Massachusetts anti-alien law of 1859; the anti-Semitism of Henry Wilson, the anti-slavery Senator from Massachusetts; the alleged indifference of the Abolitionists and anti-slavery Republicans in Congress to General Grant's anti-Jewish order; and the welcome given to "Parson" Brownlow, the anti-Semitic clergyman from Tennessee, during his tour of the North.

* * *

"One characteristic of the abolitionists which aroused Wise's heated resentment," writes Doctor Korn, "was the ethical inconsistency revealed in their lack of concern for other minority groups. In 1859, for instance, the people of Massachusetts, by referendum, adopted an anti-alien law whereby the right to vote and hold office was denied to the foreign-born until they could certify a residence of seven years in the United States, and naturalization as citizens. This curtailment of the rights of white men in a state notorious for its violent abolitionists, convinced Wise that the abo-

⁵ *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, vol. XXV, no. 36 (June 14, 1864), second page (no pagination).

⁶ B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 26.

litionists were not humanitarians, but that they, rather, were politicians with a peculiar program for achieving power.”⁷

One of the implications of these sentences is that the Abolitionists were a dominant political force in Massachusetts and could therefore be held responsible for the anti-alien law. This actually was not so. The anti-alien law was passed through the efforts of certain leaders of the Republican party of Massachusetts. But the Republican party of that State was not an Abolitionist party, did not favor the emancipation of the slave, and included numerous members who were not opposed to the maintenance of slavery. Edith Ellen Ware, in a study of “Political Opinion in Massachusetts during Civil War and Reconstruction,”⁸ emphasizes that the Republican party had few Abolitionists in it. The Republican party platform, she notes, “was clearly not abolitionist, and although it had some radical followers, the most of the extremists stood without and criticized.”⁹ Indeed, “never can it be said that abolition was to Massachusetts the cause, the end or the aim of the war . . . Union, *not* abolition, was the watchword of Massachusetts. Emancipation was incident and coincident...”¹⁰

A study of the writings and speeches of the best known anti-slavery leaders of Massachusetts, even those in the Republican party, reveals their consistent opposition to the anti-alien law; indeed, to all anti-foreign agitation. On April 8, 1859, at the height of the agitation for the law, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's weekly newspaper, pub-

⁷ “Isaac Mayer Wise on the Civil War,” *supra*, p. 643; see also B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, pp. 26-27, for a similar statement. Korn's description of the 1859 law is not adequate. It was an amendment to the Massachusetts constitution, and provided that foreigners could not vote or hold office unless they had resided in the United States for two years after naturalization, thus increasing their total probationary period from five to seven years. The law was repealed in 1863.

⁸ *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, vol. LXXIV, no. 2 (New York: Columbia University, 1916).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

lished a letter from K. Heinzen, the editor of the *Pionier*, a newspaper published in Boston, for German immigrants. The letter condemned the proposed law and asked Garrison for his opinion of it. Garrison, in an editorial comment in the same issue, replied as follows:

While we do not go to the polls ourselves, (having long since withdrawn from them as a matter of conscience,) we, nevertheless, strongly condemn an act of political injustice like that referred to by the editor of the "Pionier"; and we have scarcely a doubt that the proposed amendment to the Constitution of Massachusetts, should it be submitted to the people, will be rejected by a decided majority. "Know-Nothingism" has had its day, and this is its last expiring effort. It is but justice to say that, outside of this Commonwealth, no countenance is given by the Republican journals to this proscription.¹¹

The same issue of *The Liberator* carried a statement, entitled "Address of the German Citizens of Toledo, Ohio, to the People of Massachusetts," which condemned the proposed legislation and the Republican party of Massachusetts for supporting it, and ended with a plea to "the People of Massachusetts to reject the proposed amendment to their Constitution."¹² Concerning this statement, *The Liberator* commented that

We heartily respond to the following just and responsible appeal, in regard to the attempt to change the Constitution of Massachusetts, so as to bear proscriptively and invidiously against our naturalized fellow-citizens in the exercise of the elective franchise.¹³

There also appeared in this issue the reprint of an editorial from the *Chicago Tribune*, which denounced the proposed law. Two weeks later, *The Liberator* again affirmed the fact that "the abolitionists have never sought to proscribe our foreign

¹¹ *The Liberator*, vol. XXIX, April 8, 1859, p. 56.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

population at any time or in any way." It added the very appropriate comment, however, that

We have no sort of respect for any foreign naturalized citizen who is denouncing as unjust and tyrannical the proposition to add two years to the term fixed by the naturalization law, before the right to vote can be enjoyed, but who, at the same time, cares nothing that four millions of *native-born Americans* are stripped of every right, ranked with the brutes, bought and sold as property, and subjected to insults, outrages and tortures innumerable. His love of liberty is nothing but personal selfishness.¹⁴

In subsequent issues, *The Liberator* reprinted various other condemnations of the proposed law: a speech by Carl Schurz, delivered in Boston's Faneuil Hall, on April 18th,¹⁵ a letter from Henry Wilson,¹⁶ an editorial from the *Provincetown Banner*,¹⁷ and an extract from a speech delivered by William H. Herndon, Abolitionist and law-partner of Abraham Lincoln, in Illinois. Herndon stated unequivocally:

This law is wrong and unjust . . . I now repeat that, though I am native-born, my country is the world, and my love for man is as broad as the race, and as deep as its humanity. As a matter of course, I include native and foreign people, Protestant and Catholic, "Jew and Gentile."¹⁸

The vast majority of anti-slavery leaders and Abolitionists were no less opposed to the law. William Bean, in his study of "Puritan Versus Celt," stresses that "prominent local leaders like Henry Wilson, Charles Sumner, and John A. Andrew, later war governor, pleaded in vain with the voters to reject this illiberal measure."¹⁹ Henry Wilson acted as chairman of the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1859, p. 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, April 29, 1859, p. 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1859, p. 69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, May 27, 1859, p. 84.

¹⁹ William Bean, "Puritan Versus Celt, 1850-1860," *New England Quarterly*, vol. VII, p. 87.

meeting at which Carl Schurz spoke in opposition to the law. The former also expressed his sentiments in a letter to the Honorable Francis Gillett, of Hartford, in which he affirmed that "Whatever others may do, I shall vote without hesitation or reluctance against the adoption of the two years' amendment to the Constitution of Massachusetts." He also emphasized:

But I have ever declared that I would support no measure, even to reform these abuses, which would in the slightest degrade any man, or class of men; that I would give to every human being equal rights, the same equality I would claim for myself or my own son.²⁰

The opposition of the Abolitionists to any attempt to deprive the foreign-born of equal rights is attested to by other facts. Oscar Handlin, in his study of *Boston's Immigrants*, notes that Charles Francis Adams, Wendell Phillips, and Charles Sumner "felt no ends justified nativist methods."²¹ In 1855, Charles Sumner courted political suicide when, at the height of Know-Nothing influence in Massachusetts, he attacked that party and its anti-alien policy. Said he:

It is proposed to attain men for religion, and also for birth. If this object can prevail, vain are the triumphs of civil freedom in its many hard-fought fields, vain is that religious toleration which we profess. The fires of Smithfield, the tortures of the Inquisition, the proscriptions of Non-Conformists, may all be revived. Mainly to escape these outrages, dictated by a dominant religious sect, was our country early settled . . . Slowly among the struggling sects was evolved that great idea of the equality of all men before the law, without regard to religious belief; nor can any party now organize a proscription merely for religious belief without calling in question this well-established principle . . . The history of our country, in its humblest as well as most exalted spheres, testifies to the merit of foreigners . . . A party which, beginning in secrecy,

²⁰ Reprinted in *The Liberator*, vol. XXIX, May 6, 1859, p. 69; also, in part, in Thomas Russell and Elias Nason, *The Life and Public Services of Hon. Henry Wilson* (Boston, 1872), pp. 146-147.

²¹ Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 208.

interferes with religious belief, and founds a discrimination on the accident of birth, is not the party for us.²²

In a letter dated February 22, 1855, Theodore Parker, the leading Abolitionist clergyman, wrote:

But it seems to me the American party rests on a very narrow foundation. I have no blood in my veins which did not come here between 1620 and 1640, but it is no better than if it had come between 1820 and 1840. Democracy must rest on humanity, not mere nationality or on modes of religion. I am as far removed from Catholicism as any man in America; but I should be ashamed to ask any religious privilege which I would not grant to any other man in the country. I would never exclude any man from office on account of his birth or religious creed; only for his character.²³

It is well known that certain anti-slavery men did join the Know-Nothing or American party in Massachusetts. Of these, Henry Wilson was the most prominent. Wilson's biographer notes, however, that "He loathed the intolerant nativist spirit of the Know Nothings," and that he joined the party only in the belief that it could be liberalized and converted into "an important force for the cause of freedom."²⁴ To understand why Wilson remained in the party for several years, it should be noted that, in Massachusetts, the Know-Nothing Party consisted of two groupings, and that most measures aimed at restricting the influence of immigrants in politics "were," according to Handlin,

sponsored by the purely nativist branch of the Party, which declined in importance after 1854 and left the reformers [among them Wilson] in control . . .²⁵

The success of Wilson and other reformers in vitiating the anti-foreign platform of the party, from 1854 to 1857, when

²² Edward L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner* (Boston, 1893), vol. III, pp. 422-423.

²³ John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker* (New York, 1864), vol. II, p. 238.

²⁴ *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. XX, p. 323.

²⁵ O. Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, *supra*, p. 211, note 99.

it controlled the government of Massachusetts, is described by Handlin.

Ostensibly the party had acquired power to restrict the influence of immigrants in politics. Yet, though it had absolute control of the government, it failed to pass a single measure to that effect.²⁶

Indeed, "true nativists like Morse," he notes, "had so little sympathy for Massachusetts Know-Nothingism that they charged it was 'a Jesuitical ruse, gotten up for the purpose of creating a sympathy in favor of the church.'"²⁷

* * *

The impression of the Abolitionists as schizophrenic humanitarians, prejudiced toward all minority groups other than Negroes, is strengthened by references to the anti-Semitic remarks of Henry Wilson, the anti-slavery Senator from Massachusetts. Doctor Korn cites two examples culled from the pages of *The Israelite*. On one occasion, following Judah P. Benjamin's secession speech in the Senate, Wilson scathingly rebuked the latter for seceding from a Union "which gives equality of rights even to that race that stoned Prophets and crucified the Redeemer of the World."²⁸ About a year later, in a debate on fiscal policy, he referred to "the Jew brokers," and "curbstone Jew broker" in a speech.²⁹ Doctor Korn, referring to these remarks, mentions that, in Rabbi Wise's opinion, "the anti-Semitic character of some abolitionists discredited the entire movement."³⁰

In evaluating Wilson's remarks, several factors should be kept in mind. First, such public expressions of animus toward

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 211, note 99.

²⁸ B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 168.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168. The original source of both remarks is *The Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2nd Session, Feb. 21, 1861, p. 1091; and 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Feb. 13, 1862, p. 789.

³⁰ "Isaac Mayer Wise on the Civil War," *supra*, p. 644.

Jews is rare in Abolitionist literature. Charles Sumner, Wilson's colleague in the Senate, never, in his entire lifetime, uttered an anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish remark. Nor does one find any example of a similar remark, publicly uttered, by any of the other Abolitionist leaders we have mentioned. Wilson's remarks were isolated expressions in a public career which extended over thirty years, more than fifteen of which were spent in the Senate. We know, moreover, that as chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, Wilson played an important part in securing equal chaplaincy rights for Jews. The Reverend Bernhard Felsenthal, of Chicago, whose mind was not clouded by anti-abolitionist bias, believed that Wilson had championed the revision of the existing law, which provided only for Christian chaplains, and attributed to him the favorable response of the Military Affairs Committee to the idea of Jewish Chaplaincy rights.³¹ It was Wilson, indeed, who, as chairman of the Committee, introduced the revised bill in the Senate, and urged its passage.

Doctor Korn heightens the impression of Senator Wilson's anti-Semitism and makes it seem a natural outgrowth of other prejudices, by citing his earlier membership in the Know-Nothing Party and remarking that he "had achieved office by way of the Know-Nothing agitation against aliens and Catholics."³² As we have previously shown, however, the available evidence indicates that Wilson did not subscribe to that Party's anti-alien program. Instead, he helped to prevent the passage of anti-alien legislation at the height of Know-Nothing power in Massachusetts, and he publicly and forthrightly opposed the passage of the 1859 anti-alien law.

³¹ *Sinai*, vol. VII, pp. 200-201. One finds a strange contradiction in Doctor Korn's writing on this subject. In his essay (p. 644), he accepts Rabbi Felsenthal's opinion about Wilson's part in the affair as correct. In his book, he writes that "The Republican rabbi of Chicago, the Rev. Bernhard Felsenthal, must have been confused about Wilson's attitude towards the Jews." See p. 289, note 92.

³² B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 168.

In short, although at a certain period of his career, Wilson made certain anti-Semitic remarks, this anti-Semitism was limited in time and in its expression, it does not seem to have been related to any anti-alien sentiment, it was a rare occurrence if judged in terms of an entire lifetime, it did not affect his espousal of equal chaplaincy rights for Jews, and it was not typical of the public statements of other anti-slavery leaders.

* * *

The reaction of anti-slavery Republicans to Grant's Order No. 11, issued on December 17, 1862, in which he expelled all Jews from the Department of the Tennessee, has been a fertile source of condemnation of Abolitionists and Republicans alike. The anti-slavery Republicans in Congress, in particular, have incurred more than a modicum of censure in Doctor Korn's treatment of this issue. Their refusal to pass a resolution censuring General Grant has been interpreted as confirmation of their indifference to the welfare of Jews.

The order was issued, let us remember, when Northern military fortunes were at their nadir. Charles Sumner's biographer, Edward L. Pierce, writes that

The year 1862 closed disastrously to our arms; and the first half of the next year was discouraging to the patriot heart . . . It was a period of despondency among soldiers and among the people. Many of Sumner's correspondents describe the deep and prevailing gloom in the community.³³

Grant, as Doctor Korn admits, was "the only general who seemed to be able to win battles."³⁴

It was under these circumstances that Democratic Senator Powell of Kentucky introduced his resolution, on January 5th, condemning the order as "illegal, tyrannical, cruel, and unjust,"

³³ E. L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, *supra*, vol. IV, p. 113.

³⁴ B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 127.

and requesting the President "to countermand" it.³⁵ It should be emphasized that the resolution was introduced *after* the order had been revoked and the rights of the Jews in the Department of the Tennessee had been restored. The purpose of the resolution was, thus, not to restore such rights but, as Doctor Korn suggests, "to take a poke at the Republican Administration,"³⁶ and to hinder the war effort by publicly censuring "the only general who seemed to be able to win battles." Obviously, the Republicans would have been short-sighted and recreant to the best interests of the war effort and the liberation of the slave had they permitted the resolution to pass. Their final decision was to table it, at the same time expressing disapproval of the type of policy represented by the order, namely, the wholesale condemnation of an entire class of people.

To Doctor Korn, however, this action meant that "Political considerations were paramount, and damaged ideals were secondary."³⁷ Apparently, the winning of the war against slavery and the liberation of an entire race were no more than "political considerations." One sees here the subtle influence of Rabbi Wise's pro-slavery views, which did not take the form of an open defense of the institution of slavery, but condemned any effort to free the slave, maligned those who sought to do so, and denounced the condemnation of slavery in the South. Moreover, the suggestion that when the Senate voted to table the resolution there remained certain "damaged ideals" is specious. The implication is that the rights of Jews had not been restored in the Department of the Tennessee. Such implication is incorrect in view of President Lincoln's earlier action in revoking the order.

Nor is it true, as Doctor Korn states, that "The vote to

³⁵ This phrase was removed when it was called to Senator Powell's attention that the President had countermanded the order.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

table, 30 to 7, really ignored the violation of Constitutional rights affected by The Order.”³⁸ No question of constitutional rights was involved. Nor would the passage of the resolution have restored or granted any legal rights not already held by the Jews of the Department of the Tennessee. At best the resolution was only an expression of opinion, not a right-giving document. The only one capable of righting the wrong committed by General Grant was President Lincoln, not Congress. Congress had no direct jurisdiction over General Grant, who held his position and issued orders by virtue of the authority given him by President Lincoln. At best, Congress could only suggest to the President that he countermand the order. Since he had already done so, the matter was clearly settled.

It is interesting to note that President Lincoln never did condemn Grant publicly for issuing the order. He merely had the order revoked. If anyone were called upon to condemn General Grant and the order itself, it should have been President Lincoln, who had appointed Grant in the first place and given him the power to issue orders. Lincoln, however, did not censure Grant in any way. Yet, Doctor Korn condemns the Republicans in Congress, and singles out the anti-slavery leaders, for following a policy based upon agreement with President Lincoln’s action — revoking the order but not making a formal, public condemnation of Grant.

One more word. In discussing the debate in the Senate over Senator Powell’s resolution, Doctor Korn comments that the Republicans — he mentions Hale and Clark of New Hampshire and Wilson and Sumner of Massachusetts — did not defend “the Order itself; they all had Jewish constituents. They paid lip-service to the right of the Jew to legal procedure.”³⁹ How important Jewish votes were to anti-slavery Senators Hale and Clark, may be judged from the fact that even as late as 1906 there were only “two Jewish congregations in New Hampshire,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

with a total membership of eighty persons.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Wilson, during the debate, did far more than “pay lip-service to the right of the Jew to legal procedure.” He expressed disapproval of the order in no uncertain terms.

I do not approve of the order; I think it was unwise; I have no doubt it was unjust. It is wrong to single out any particular class of men in this country, and as a class condemn them.⁴¹

Finally, anyone familiar with the career of Charles Sumner would know that time and again he defied the votes of constituents and courted political disaster, as in his opposition to the Know-Nothing agitation, to uphold the principle of equal rights for all men. Thus the motive imputed to the four Senators we have mentioned is exceedingly wide of the truth and, in so far as it implies that they were hypocritical in their response to the entire issue, is an injustice to each of them.⁴²

* * *

In 1862, “Parson” Brownlow, the anti-Semitic, pro-Union, Protestant clergyman from Tennessee, toured the North. Doctor Korn writes as follows of Northern reaction to Brownlow:

Once he had reached Union territory, he became a national hero and made a triumphal tour of the North. Everywhere he spoke he took a poke at “the little Jew” who had persecuted and oppressed him. The North virtually lionized him⁴³

Rabbi Wise, by implication, attributed what he alleged to be the favorable welcome given to Brownlow by the Abolitionists to Abolitionist prejudice toward the Jew.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. VIII, p. 165.

⁴¹ *The Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 246.

⁴² A similar criticism may be made of Doctor Korn’s treatment of the resolution concerning Grant in the House.

⁴³ B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 167.

⁴⁴ “Isaac Mayer Wise on the Civil War,” *supra*, p. 644.

The crucial question, of course, is, to what extent did the Abolitionists welcome Brownlow? The answer is that they were the one group in the population who despised Brownlow and refused to welcome him. *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, in commenting upon Brownlow's tour, described him as "the blackguard Parson Brownlow," and asserted,

We are sorry to say that many respectable citizens are not ashamed to be found "lionizing" the creature who never opens his mouth without emitting a stream of vulgarity and profanity.⁴⁵

In similar fashion, *The Liberator* wrote:

... a more coarse-minded, vulgar, abusive, pugilistic disputant it would be difficult to find. It is something to his credit, under such trying circumstances, that he refused to play the traitor; but this makes him neither a gentleman nor a Christian.⁴⁶

* * *

The Abolitionists, like other human beings, undoubtedly had their faults. Some, such as Wilson and Parker, accepted certain stereotyped opinions and prejudices concerning Jews and, at times, gave expression to these prejudices. Yet, as one studies Abolitionist writings and speeches, one finds an unflagging devotion to equal rights for all men, including Jews and aliens, unsurpassed by any other group of their day. They show, too, a sympathy and insight into Jewish suffering which is rare for the period, and far overshadows whatever faults they may have had.

In 1849, in a famous case argued before the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, involving the segregation of Negro school children in the public schools of Boston, Charles Sumner expressed his abhorrence of Jewish as well as Negro segregation. "The Jews in Rome," he pointed out,

⁴⁵ *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, vol. XXII, April 26, 1862, second page (no pagination).

⁴⁶ *The Liberator*, vol. XXXII, April 18, 1862, p. 62.

are confined to a particular district called the Ghetto, and in Frankfort to a district known as the Jewish Quarter. It is possible that their accommodations are as good as they would be able to occupy, if left free to choose throughout Rome and Frankfort; but this compulsory segregation from the mass of citizens is of itself an *inequality* which we condemn. It is a vestige of ancient intolerance directed against a despised people. It is of the same character with the separate schools in Boston.⁴⁷

Theodore Parker speaks derogatorily, in several of his letters, of certain allegedly Jewish traits. On the other hand, in many other letters, in his journals, and in public speeches he pays glowing tribute to Jewish ideals and achievement. In the famous autobiographical letter to his congregation, shortly before his death, he writes:

For fifteen hundred years the Jews, a nation scattered and peeled, and exposed to most degrading influences, in true religion have been above the Christians.⁴⁸

In 1843, Parker visited Europe. He describes, in his journal, his visit to the Jewish quarter of Prague and the emotional impact of the Jewish cemetery upon him.

Here are the graves of famous Rabbis, of good Levites; of nobles, also, for in this land the Jews sit down with princes. I never saw a Jewish grave-yard before, and this spot made me feel as never before. I have an inborn affection for this mysterious people, for ages oppressed, yet green and living still. I thought of the service they had done mankind — and the reward they got! Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and the Prophets, came up to my mind, and He who was the culmination of Hebrewdom, the blossom of the nation. I shall never forget my feelings as I also laid a stone piously on the tomb of a Patriarch who died 1000 year ago, and plucked an elder leaf from the tree that rooted among his mouldered ashes.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Equality Before the Law," in *The Works of Charles Sumner*, vol. II (Boston, 1894), p. 364.

⁴⁸ J. Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, *supra*, vol. II, p. 497.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 214.

Concerning his crossing of the bridge over the Moldau, he writes:

Went to the famous bridge over the Moldau, from which John of Nepomuck was thrown . . . Here was a crucifix of gilt bronze, erected out of the fines paid by the Jews for blaspheming the Christian religion! It stands there to insult them every time they pass the stream! What would Jesus say of them who take his name in vain, could he come back.⁵⁰

Parker was deeply interested in Hebrew and rabbinic literature — in his youth he taught Hebrew at the Cambridge Theological Seminary⁵¹ and he learned Hebrew from a Jewish teacher, a Mr. J. Seixas⁵² — and he writes feelingly of his visit to a Jewish bookshop in Prague:

I went into a Jewish book-store, and bought a few Hebrew books as memorials of the place and the nation; Hebrew prayers and Hebrew stories — no nation excels them for both — and a little modern Hebrew poetry. The little old man was attentive, and seem [*sic*] pleased that a stranger took interest in Hebrew literature. He had a fine copy of the Talmud, twelve volumes, large paper, for forty gulden!⁵³

In 1858, Parker summed up his social and religious creed, in a letter to Mrs. Julia Bridges:

I find good and religious men amongst all classes of men, Trinitarians, Unitarians, Salvationists, and Damnationists, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mahomedans, Heathen. There is one God for us all . . .⁵⁴

One finds few references in the writings of William Lloyd Garrison to the Jews of his day. However, in one such reference, in an article written in 1831, on "The Colored Population of the United States," he shows the similarity between discrimination directed against the Jew and that encountered by

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 214–215.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 252.

the Negro and other oppressed groups. After describing the situation of the Negro in the United States, he states:

The division of society into castes is not peculiar to this country or to the present age. In every age and almost every nation, institutions of a similar character have been found. By castes I mean classes or ranks of men divided from their fellows, not by any just cause of distinction, as virtue or vice, wealth or poverty, learning or ignorance, talent or incapacity, but by a difference in legal or social rights, originating in hereditary or unreasonable distinctions . . . In Russia and other parts of Europe, there are serfs, or hereditary bondmen, attached to the soil. The Catholics in Great Britain and Ireland were, for a long time, a degraded caste, debarred from civil and political rights, and subject to severe penal laws . . . The Jews in Europe were for a long time in a similar situation, being despised and abused from the mere circumstance of their descent and religion. The prejudice against the Jews, though very much abated, continues even at the present time.⁵⁵

His devotion, however, to equal rights for all, including Jews, is expressed in an editorial which he reprinted in *The Liberator* from the *Philadelphia Press*. The editorial condemned a proposed amendment to the Constitution affirming belief in God and the divinity of Jesus Christ. In expressing its condemnation, the editorial emphasized that

no one can fail to see that the Jew, Unitarian, or Deist could not worship in his own way, as an American citizen, precisely because the Constitution, under which his citizenship exists, would make faith in the New Testament and the divinity of Jesus Christ a national creed.⁵⁶

It is interesting to note that, in 1858, *The Liberator* supported the exclusion of the Bible from the Common Schools of Boston, an issue of some importance at the time. "We deny the right of the State," Garrison wrote, "to take the common money to buy Bibles, any more than to build churches or to sustain a priest-

⁵⁵ *The Liberator*, vol. VIII, Sept. 21, 1838, p. 150.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. XXXIV, Dec. 16, 1864, p. 204.

hood.”⁵⁷ Finally, mention ought to be made of a very moving poem which appeared in *The Liberator* on April 22, 1859.⁵⁸ Entitled “An Israelite, and an American Law,” it contrasted the City of Refuge provided for the slayer in Jewish law with the American policy of returning the fugitive slave to his owner. The poem reads, in part, as follows:

Christian America! hast thou no State
Where Slavery's fugitives may safely wait?
No refuge cities, where the innocent,
With long and anxious flight weary and spent,
'Neath just and equal laws secure may rest,
No human bloodhounds daring to molest?

Yet, noble Hebrew Leader, such will plead —
Slave-torturers, slave-sellers — plead thy laws
To sanction wickedness; and call their creed
More merciful than thine. They will not pause
To mark thee, in thy nation's righteous cause,
Choose freedom in the wilds with danger rife,
Leave pomp and luxury for a wanderer's life.
Thou couldst not change the manners of thine age;
But where thou couldst not change, thou didst assuage.
Slaveholders slander thee whene'er they plead
Thy laws to sanction a vile, cruel deed;
Yet e'en they dare not say in them is found,
Thou mad'st all Israel one hunting-ground,
Where slaves were game, and Israel's greatest men,
Judge, elder, priest and Levite, all were bound
To act as guardians over a slave pen.
Thou who didst give to blameless homicide
Safety, until the Law his cause decide,
Thou wouldst not punish those whose kindness gave
Food, shelter, pity, to a trembling slave.
Yet here, even where the churches' shadows fall,
The hunted slaves in vain for pity call!

Tenterden, (England)

JANE ASHBY

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. XXVIII, Dec. 17, 1858, p. 202.

⁵⁸ *The Liberator*, vol. XXIX, p. 64.

Another prominent abolitionist was Lydia Maria Child. An author of note, novelist, biographer, historian, and an editor of *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, she wrote one of the most effective and best-known anti-slavery tracts of pre-Civil War days, "An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans." Her interest in Judaism was expressed as early as 1841 in an essay she wrote concerning her visit to a New York synagogue.⁵⁹ In 1855, Lydia Child published a three-volume work entitled *The Progress of Religious Ideas, Through Successive Ages*. Writing as a devoted Christian, her discussion of Jewish disabilities and of the persecution of Jews by Christians is remarkable. She comments, as follows, upon Christian treatment of the Jew:

As a general thing, Christians have manifested very little kindness, or candour, in their estimate of other religions; but the darkest blot on their history is their treatment of the Jews. This is the more singular, because we have so much in common with them. We worship the same God, under the same name; we reverence their Scriptures; we make pilgrimages to their Holy City. Christ, and his Mother, and his Apostles, were Jews, and appear to have conformed to the established worship of the country; which we consequently claim as our sacred land. That the crucifixion occurred there was the fault of very few of the people . . . But though so few were implicated in the cruel transaction, the Fathers were accustomed to speak of all Jews, in all parts of the world, as "murderers of Christ"; and they were everywhere hated and persecuted, as if each one of them had put him to death, knowing him to be the Son of God. For nearly two thousand years has this rancorous hostility been perpetuated, though it rests on such an unjust and irrational foundation. And men who branded all the Jews as outcasts, who plundered and slaughtered them, for an offence committed by a small number of their very remote ancestors, were accustomed to quote, as their standard, the prayer which

⁵⁹ See *The National Anti Slavery Standard*, vol. II, Sept. 23, 1841, p. 63. This was the sixth of her "Letters from New York." It appeared later in a volume entitled *Letters From New York* (New York and Boston, 1845), pp. 37-47. See Lee M. Friedman, "Mrs. Child's Visit to a New York Synagogue in 1841," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. XXXVIII, part 3 (March, 1949), pp. 173-184.

Jesus offered for those who were the immediate causes of his death: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."⁶⁰

Concerning the refusal of Jews to convert to Christianity, she writes:

If we looked at the subject candidly, I think we should acknowledge as heroic martyrs, those men and women, who resisted constant appeals to their fears and their selfishness, and at the cost of incredible sacrifices and sufferings, still set their faces steadfastly toward Jerusalem, and replied: "After this manner worship we the God of our fathers." Ever since I have reflected on the subject, I have never been able to do otherwise than reverence their firmness and their faith.⁶¹

In a letter to a friend, in 1859, she wrote concerning a certain Jewish author:

A Jewess she is, of course. I am always pleased to have the Jews do anything great; as I am to have the colored people, or any other persecuted race.⁶²

Abolitionist abhorrence of discrimination against the Jew, and interest in Jewish life, customs and institutions may be gathered from reading *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, a weekly newspaper, the official organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society, published and edited in New York by Garrisonian abolitionists. Among the editors were such outstanding anti-slavery leaders as Oliver Johnson, Sydney Gay, Lydia Child and her husband, David Lee Child, and James Russell Lowell.

The tone of the publication was set in its very first issue, in June, 1840, when it announced that

Our platform is as broad as humanity, and our invitation to all. Come on, then, to the conflict! Jew and Gentile, colored and white, men and women⁶³

⁶⁰ Lydia M. Child, *The Progress of Religious Ideas, Through Successive Ages* [3 volumes] (New York, 1855), vol. III, pp. 439-440.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

⁶² *Letters of Lydia Maria Child* (Boston, 1883), p. 141.

⁶³ *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, vol. I, June 11, 1840, p. 2.

That *The Standard's* interests were as broad as humanity may be seen from the many articles it published concerning Jewish customs and ceremonies, Jewish communities in different parts of the world, and various issues relating to Jewish life.⁶⁴ In November, 1844, in an editorial entitled "Movements of the Jews," it mentioned Mordecai M. Noah's plan for the creation of a Jewish refuge in the United States, discussed the early Zionist movement sympathetically, and discerned

a better and more happy destiny reserved for the Jewish people, through a proper estimate of the principles and duty of Christianity.⁶⁵

In December, 1858, at the height of American interest in the Mortara case, *The Standard* carried a long editorial which condemned the papal authorities and criticized President Buchanan's refusal to intervene. Referring to the kidnapping as "this crime against Religious Liberty and natural right," and as "an atrocity which may well arouse the sympathetic indignation of the civilized world," it asked, referring to the President's policy of neutrality:

... what impropriety could there be in one Christian government remonstrating with another on a gross infringement of the laws of nature and of natural justice?

The answer it gave was that it was slavery, with its denial of the rights of the Negro, that made it so difficult for the President to intervene on behalf of the Jewish child.⁶⁶

An event which should have evoked any anti-Semitism latent in the minds of the editors of *The Standard* was Dr.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, Aug. 27, 1840, p. 48; vol. II, Sept. 23, 1841, p. 63; vol. II, Feb. 17, 1842, p. 148; vol. IX, Feb. 1, 1849, p. 144; vol. IX, March 29, 1849, p. 176; vol. XII, Sept. 11, 1851, p. 64; vol. XIV, Oct. 1, 1853, p. 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. V, Nov. 21, 1844, p. 100.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. XIX, Dec. 11, 1858, no. 30. Morris U. Schappes in his *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1950), p. 386 and p. 674, note 6, provides further evidence that slavery prevented active American intervention in the Mortara case.

Raphall's defense of slavery in 1861. *The Standard* reacted to it by featuring a letter from one of its readers, which refuted Dr. Raphall's opinions and emphasized their divergence from both traditional Judaism and Christianity. "I am sure," the letter began, "that you and every good *Ye-hoode* (Jew), as well as every good *Go-e* (Gentile), must have been surprised and mortified in reading the sermon preached by Dr. Raphall . . . This statement no pious *Ye-hoode* or *Go-e* in Europe or America will believe." The letter also asserts that "he cannot be either a pious Jew or Christian who is a slaveholder; but infidels of both sects have done it."⁶⁷

At a later date, in 1862, *The Standard* drew an interesting parallel between persecution of the Jew and the Negro. Remarking that the whites "choose to oppress the dark people in a manner as thorough-going as the Venetians did the Jews, at once tyrannizing over them and libelling them," it made the following observation, in a footnote:

We are told that Shakespeare, in the Merchant of Venice, reversed the characters in the old story which served as a foundation for his plot, to suit the prejudices of his English audience; and that the baseness and cruelty ascribed to the Shylock of his play were historically true of the Antonio. Shylock's defence of himself and his tribe against the contempt and injustice of the people who passed for Christians at that time was a just and fair defence. And the colored people may appropriately use the same against the sanctimonious oppressors who call themselves Christians at the present day.⁶⁸

Finally, one ought to mention the well-known report delivered at the 1853 meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. This report summarized the attitudes of American Jews toward slavery and the extent of their participation in the American anti-slavery movement. It said:

⁶⁷ *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, vol. XXI, March 16, 1861, second page (no pagination).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. XXIII, May 24, 1862, second page (no pagination).

The Jews of the United States have never taken any steps whatever with regard to the Slavery question. As citizens, they deem it their policy "to have every one choose which ever side he may deem best to promote his own interests and the welfare of his country." They have no organization of an ecclesiastical body to represent their general views; no General Assembly, or its equivalent. The American Jews have two newspapers, but they do not interfere in any discussion which is not material to their religion. It cannot be said that the Jews have formed any denominational opinion on the subject of American slavery. Some of the Jews, who reside in slave States, have refused to have any property in man, or even to have any slaves about them. They do not believe that any thing analogous to slavery, as it exists in this country, ever prevailed among the ancient Israelites. But they profess to believe that "the belief of Abraham, enlarged by Moses, and now acknowledged by the Jews, is one of purity and morality, and one which presents the strongest possible support for civil society, *especially a government based upon principles of equality and liberty of the person!* They believe that the coming of the King Messiah will be the signal for universal peace, UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, universal knowledge, and universal worship of the One Eternal.

The objects of so much mean prejudice and unrighteous oppression as the Jews have been for ages, surely they, it would seem, more than any other denomination, ought to be the enemies of CASTE, and friends of UNIVERSAL FREEDOM.⁶⁹

In one of his few friendly comments concerning Abolitionists, Doctor Korn remarks that

This report . . . was substantially correct, and in that regard rather unusual for an age in which so much misinformation about the Jews was broadcast far and wide.⁷⁰

These selections will serve to indicate the broad nature of Abolitionist sympathies and ideals. The Abolitionists con-

⁶⁹ The complete text appears in M. U. Schappes, *Documentary History*, *supra*, pp. 332-333. It is also quoted in part in Korn's *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 15. The original source is *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁰ B. W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, *supra*, p. 15.

centrated their efforts and their strivings on behalf of the Negro because the Negro was the most oppressed of all Americans — compared to whom the disabilities of others were of but minor importance. Yet the Abolitionists condemned oppression and discrimination wherever these existed. And their efforts to help the downtrodden slave and the despised free Negro frequently helped them to see, and understand, more than did others, the suffering of the Jew through the ages. Their creed and hope was the liberation of all mankind from the thralldom of oppression and inequality. And no one has better expressed that hope than Wendell Phillips, that great prophetic voice in the Abolitionist movement when, at the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, he remarked:

I hope another year will not finish before we meet here, our abolitionism lost in the universal joy, to rejoice that there is no chain on the continent; that there is nothing in the heart of the American which recognizes the distinction of races; but like the sublime monuments of antiquity, record the triumph in which all tongues, all races and all creeds mingle their prayers and offerings to a common Liberty and a common God.⁷¹

⁷¹ *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, vol. XXIV, May 23, 1863, second page (no pagination).