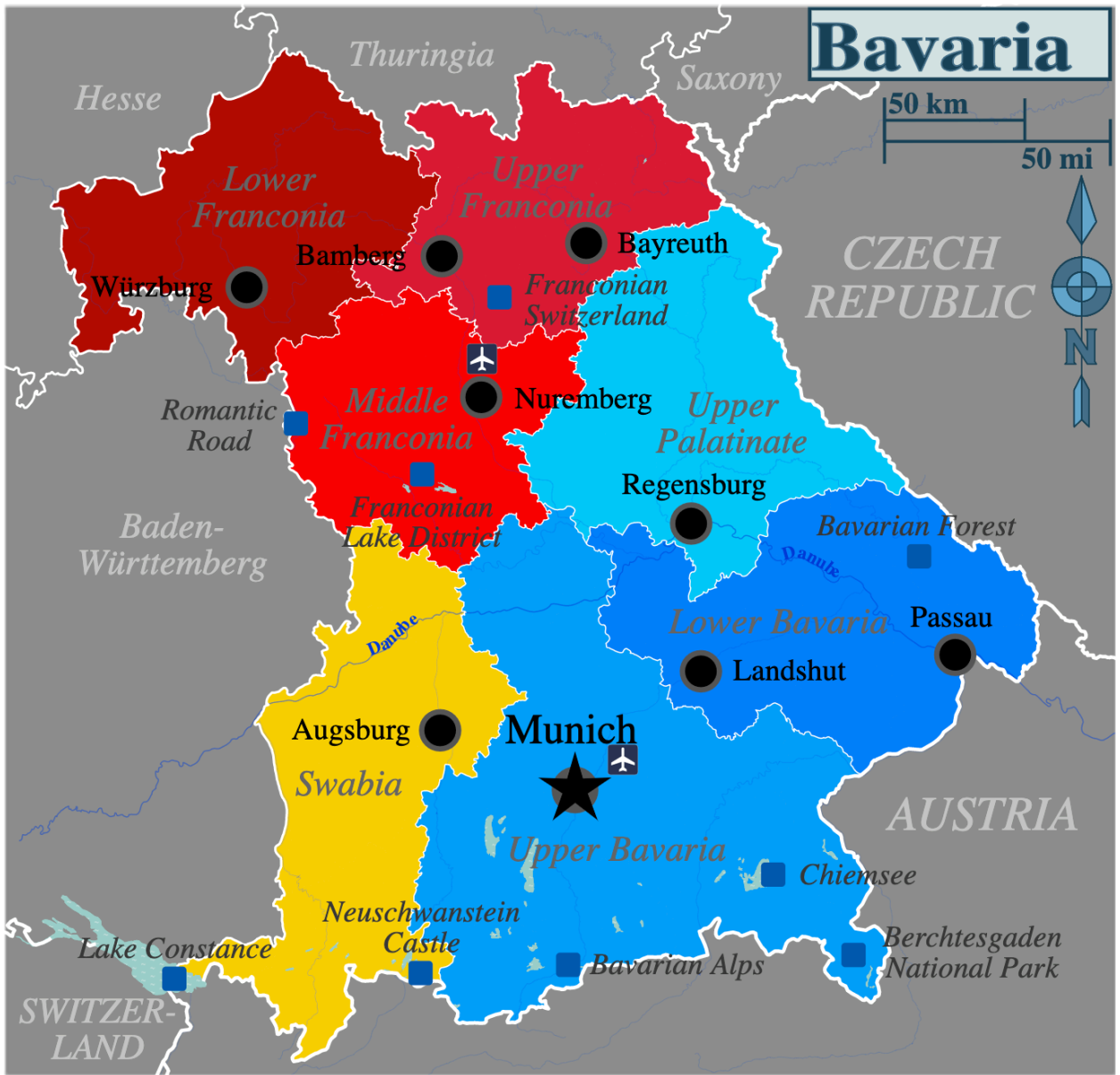


Rabbi Abraham Rice

The First Ordained Rabbi in the US



Rabbi Rael Blumenthal



THE EARLY GERMAN JEWS OF BALTIMORE

By MOSES ABERBACH

Jewish Historical Society of Maryland

(Text of lecture delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland on February 18, 1970.)

A little over a hundred years ago, the Jewish community of Baltimore was almost exclusively German. A handful of Sephardi, i. e., Spanish and Portuguese Jews had indeed arrived in the 18th century; but they had never been able to form a viable community of their own. An attempt to have a synagogue of their own proved abortive for lack of members.¹

Before the Civil War, there may also have been a few indigent East European Jews in Baltimore,² but they, too, played a negligible role in the community. To all intents and purposes, Baltimore Jewry was a hundred percent German in language and culture.

Like Julius Caesar's Gaul, the history of the Baltimore German-Jewish community can be divided into three parts. The first, which few people know about, is the German background of the immigrants, the circumstances which induced them to leave their homeland and seek their fortune in the New World. The second is the story of their struggle to adapt themselves to the changed environment in which they had to lead their social, economic and religious life. The third part is the account of their role in the Civil War and of their Americanization during the years that followed. I propose to deal with these three major aspects of the history of the German-Jewish community in Baltimore.

Where did the German-speaking Jews of Baltimore come from? Although German was the *lingua franca* of all the educated classes in central Europe—including Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Galicia, and the greater part of Hungary and Switzerland—the immigrant Jews of Baltimore were overwhelmingly of Bavarian origin. There were good reasons for this, as we shall presently see.

★ At the time of the Napoleonic wars there were some 30,000 Jews in Bavaria—a very large number for those days. It was precisely because of this that the movement for Jewish emancipation made less headway in Bavaria than anywhere else in the German-speaking world. It is easier to grant freedom to a small minority than to a large, substantial group which is liable to gain more influence and power than the majority is willing to concede.

In addition, South Germany—of which Bavaria formed the largest and most important section—was always more conservative and reactionary than other parts of Germany. Even in our own time, Bavaria was the citadel of Nazism at a time when in North Germany, including Berlin, Hitler had only a handful of followers.

The story of Jewish emancipation in Bavaria was, therefore, one of constant disappointment and frustration. Under French influence, Catholic Bavaria granted equal rights to Protestants as early as 1800. No such privileges were extended to the Jewish minority, although the hope was

expressed that measures would be taken through which the Jews "would gradually be educated to become useful citizens." The condescending tone of this insulting statement, implying as it did that the Jews, unlike Christians, needed special education before they could become "useful citizens", was hardly designed to encourage Jewish hopes for civil rights. Nevertheless, the Ghetto had bred so many Jewish Uncle Toms that even such a weak declaration was welcomed by the Bavarian Jews who then proceeded to request that their hard lot be alleviated. No concessions were made by the government until after 1806 when Napoleon had crushed the Prussian army and become virtual master of the German states. The Jews were then permitted to attend government schools and serve in the army, and in return for these paltry privileges, Jewish communal autonomy was considerably restricted. Rabbinic courts which in the past had been authorized to deal with internal Jewish disputes and matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce, were henceforth deprived of most of their functions.⁴



Naturally, the Jews continued to agitate for full emancipation; but when at last a new law was issued by the Bavarian government in 1813, it proved a bitter disappointment. The right of settlement in Bavaria was severely restricted to heads of families already long resident in Bavaria. This right could be inherited only by the oldest son who was thereby permitted to marry and have a family. The younger sons were not permitted to marry, unless a "vacancy" occurred through the death or emigration of established Jewish families. In exceptional cases, younger sons could purchase the right of marrying and setting up a family for the enormous sum of about a thousand *gulden*—a veritable fortune in those days.

The purpose of these inhuman regulations was openly stated:

"The number of Jewish families in any place in which they happen to reside must not, as a rule, be increased. It should rather be gradually diminished, if there are too many of them."⁵

In addition, the Bavarian government imposed restrictions on Jewish merchants, thus rendering free commercial activities all but impossible. As if this were not enough, the government also abolished rabbinic courts, so that even the restricted functions permitted during the years 1808-1813 were now done away with.

After Waterloo, there was a general reaction all over Germany, and in Bavaria the Jews were particularly affected by the hostile attitude of population and government alike. Nevertheless, perhaps because of their poverty and the constant harassment to which they were subjected, the Jewish population almost doubled within one generation, and is estimated to have reached some 50,000 souls or more.

In 1831, renewed attempts were made by the Jewish communities of Bavaria to secure civil rights. There were long debates in the Bavarian parliament, and one representative, a certain Dr. Lang, spoke strongly in favor of Jewish emancipation—but only on condition that "the confessors of the Mosaic religion deny the authority of the Talmud and change their Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday".⁶ In other words, if the Jews wanted emancipation, they had better stop being Jews. With such friends, the Bavarian Jews hardly needed enemies.

Eventually, a resolution was passed to the effect that the government would examine the legislation concerning the Jews, with a view to revising obnoxious laws in their favor. The Jews hailed this resolution as a great landmark; but the government was actually determined to postpone

indefinitely any action by putting forward all sorts of excuses to delay matters as long as possible. Commissions were appointed; "experts" were consulted; investigations were made; and Jewish communal and religious life was subjected to microscopic examination. Since the Jews were divided between Orthodox and Reform, this fact was used by the government to postpone still further any changes that may have been contemplated.⁷

The Jewish communities, meanwhile, sent one petition after another to the King and his ministers; but all they achieved was high praise for the good German style in which the petitions were composed. Then the papers were duly pigeonholed.

One such petition, submitted in 1837, complained bitterly about the oppressive regime under which Bavarian Jewry had to live. Many Jews, it was pointed out, were unable to endure this oppression any longer, and were therefore leaving Bavaria and emigrating to the United States.⁸ The government was apparently not unduly impressed; for nothing whatsoever was done to alleviate the position of the Bavarian Jews. It must not be assumed that the Bavarian authorities shed any tears for the departing Jews. As far as they were concerned, it was good riddance. They did not want the Jews, and the oppressive measures were useful in reducing the growing numbers of the highly prolific Jewish community.

Even the great year of Revolutions, 1848, when so many reactionary regimes came crashing down, and most German states at last granted emancipation to their Jewish citizens—even then the petitions of the Bavarian Jewish communities achieved nothing but vague promises which were never meant to be kept. On the contrary, in the smaller towns and villages, the mobs threatened to kill the Jews, and in the end Jewish attempts to gain emancipation left them more unpopular than ever.⁹

During the reactionary era following the 1848 revolutions, continued appeals for civil rights were bound to remain fruitless, and in the course of the 1850's no improvements whatsoever were registered in Bavaria. Once again, large-scale emigration to America was the inevitable result of the suppression and persecution of the Jewish communities.¹⁰

It was not before 1861 that some of the worst abuses were removed; but even then the Bavarian government was unwilling to grant full equality to its Jewish citizens. Only with the unification of Germany in 1871 did the Bavarian Jews gain complete emancipation by virtue of the Federal constitution of the German Reich.

I have dwelt at some length on the situation of the Jews in Bavaria during the nineteenth century because every wave of Jewish immigration to Baltimore up to the period of the Civil War was directly due to the intolerable situation of Bavarian Jewry. Once the pressing need to emigrate had subsided, the German-Jewish—that is, primarily, the Bavarian-Jewish—immigration to Baltimore came to virtual halt.

Now, why did the immigrants choose to live in Baltimore rather than, say, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston or Savannah? To be sure, many immigrant groups went to all these places—wherever they could make a living. But those who settled in Baltimore did so partly because of the close relations that existed between Baltimore and Bremen, a major German port from which most of the German immigrants booked their passage; and partly because in effect the shipping companies induced them to come here. From the port of Baltimore two main products of contemporary Maryland—wheat and tobacco—used to be exported. Most of the wheat went to Ireland; most of the tobacco to Germany, but the shipping companies could not make a profit if the ships returned empty,

and neither Ireland nor Germany had any exports for which there was a market in Maryland. So the ships brought back *people*—poor people— at very low fares. In Germany, virtually all the tobacco wholesalers in the Rhine Valley were also travel agents for the shipping lines. If they wanted to get their share of the profitable tobacco business, they had to book passengers for America.¹¹

Bavarian Jews, travelling north on their way to ports from which they would sail to America, would usually be approached by the shipping agents who would tempt them by offering them discount tickets for their passage. Since the emigrants were almost invariably poverty-stricken young men, they were only too pleased to accept the offer. Later on, when they had saved a little money in the Land of Opportunity, they would often come back to their home-town—not, mind you, to settle there, they were too smart for that—but to fetch a wife or a fiancée they had left behind. Since parents who might allow their sons to leave would be most reluctant to part with their unmarried daughters, there was often a desperate shortage of women, especially young women, in the New World. Bachelors who had made good would therefore pay special visits to their kith and kin, and within a few months they would return with their brides to America. Others would postpone their departure from the Old World until they were able to marry. Thus, Rabbi Benjamin Szold, one of the leading Baltimore rabbis in the nineteenth century, married his wife, to whom he had been engaged for many years, immediately prior to his emigration to America.¹²

This pattern was set in the early 1800's before the building of steamships when sailing vessels were used. Once German (as well as Irish) colonies had been set up in Baltimore, those who came later would naturally tend to join relatives and friends who had preceded them. It was because of these blind economic forces that so many German and especially Bavarian Jews found themselves in Baltimore. There was no particular reason for coming to this city. Given a free choice, most of the immigrants would probably have picked on larger, better-known cities, offering perhaps better opportunities. Eventually, it all turned out for the best. Baltimore had all the charm of the South with all the progressive spirit of the North. And if at times the city did not live up to its reputation, it must be borne in mind that other cities were not exactly perfect in their spiritual and moral beauty either.

It must be admitted, though, that for the new immigrants things in Baltimore were by no means easy. True, there were a couple of wealthy German-Jewish families such as the Ettings and the Cohens, who played a notable part in the civic, educational and commercial life of the city; but on the other hand, they were unwilling to identify with the new immigrants, preferring to regard themselves as aristocratic *Sephardim* (i. e., Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin) rather than as poor *Ashkenazim* or German Jews.¹³ For all that, they did assist their poorer co-religionists, and, what may be even more important, they played a prominent role in removing the political disabilities of the Jews in Maryland who, because of a special oath, could not be elected to any State offices. In 1826, after several abortive attempts to pass the so-called Jew Bill, the Legislature at last granted the Jews the right to be appointed to any office of trust, on condition that they "subscribe to a belief in a future state of rewards and punishments".¹⁴

All in all, there were no more than about 150 Jews in Maryland at the time, according to contemporary estimates. Nine years later, in 1835, the



Jewish population had doubled to some 300 souls. By 1840, it had risen to close to 200 families,¹⁵ and since families in those days were large, the number of Jews in Maryland—primarily, of course, Baltimore—must have been at least a thousand persons.

The overwhelmingly German-speaking Jews of Baltimore, who culturally formed a substantial section of the general Germany colony in the city, lived for the most part in East Baltimore where the first synagogues of the city (including the beautiful Lloyd Street Synagogue—the oldest synagogue in Maryland and the third oldest in the United States) were located.¹⁶ The new immigrants were assisted by those who had preceded them; but they were none-the-less extremely poor.¹⁷ Many arrived penniless, and had to be maintained by their better-off co-religionists. Yet, they did not despair or wait for others to improve their lot. They were willing to work hard as long as they could see the prospect of a better life for themselves or their children at the end of the road. Since they had few skills, and were not cut out for hard physical labor—which in any case was not likely to lead them up the social ladder—, the only thing left for them was to become peddlers,¹⁸ an occupation with which some of them were already familiar in the Old Country, in the Bavarian and Hessian villages.

In the New World, the peddler was able to play a much greater part in the progressive development of the country than in Europe. The farmers of Western Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia needed the services of the peddlers who brought them the industrial products of the city. These products were not otherwise obtainable in the small farming communities away from the urban centers near the coast. But to get to those distant places was no mean achievement. The peddler, who started out with virtually no capital, had to walk huge distances in all weathers, summer and winter, shouldering heavy packs up to 80 or even 100 lbs. He would be away from home through most of the week, returning only for the Sabbath to spend the day of rest with his family.

For many even this "luxury" was not available. They might have to spend weeks on end in the countryside, peddling, buying and selling wherever and whenever they could.



Inevitably, their religious traditions suffered in the process. It became difficult to observe the dietary laws when away from home. It often became impossible to observe the Jewish Sabbath. Economic necessity, more often than not, played havoc with the religious life of these poor, ignorant peddlers.¹⁹ The Reform movement, which did away with much of traditional Judaism, was based not only on theological or philosophical evaluations but also on harsh necessity. The German-Jewish immigrants who abandoned the dietary laws and Sabbath observance did *not* do so because they had reasoned together and "discovered" that these were human customs rather than God-given laws. On the contrary, they later excused and rationalized what they had earlier abandoned because the sheer struggle for economic survival had forced them to do so.

צבי הירש אשכנזי



לידה 1656

א' באלול ה'ת"ח

טריביטש, כתר בוהמיה

פטירה 3 במאי 1718 (בגיל 62 בערך)

א' באייר ה'תע"ח

לבוב, האיחוד הפולני-ליטאי

צאצאים יעקב עמדין

רבנו זצ"ל הפליא
מגדולת הפני-יהושע
שקודם שהתחיל
לחבר למד ש"ס ל"ו
פעמים

הרב יעקב יהושע פֿלק

לידה

19 בדצמבר 1680

כ"ח בכסלו ה'תמ"א

קרקוב, האיחוד הפולני-ליטאי

פטירה

17 בינואר 1756 (בגיל 75)

י"ד בשבט ה'תקט"ז

אופנבך, רזנות

הסן-דרמשטאדט

כינוי

הפני יהושע



הרב נתן אדלר



קברו בבית-העלמין היהודי של פרנקפורט, ברחוב באטון

לידה 16 בדצמבר 1741

י' בטבת תק"ב

פרנקפורט, העיר החופשית

פרנקפורט

פטירה 17 בספטמבר 1800 (בגיל 58)

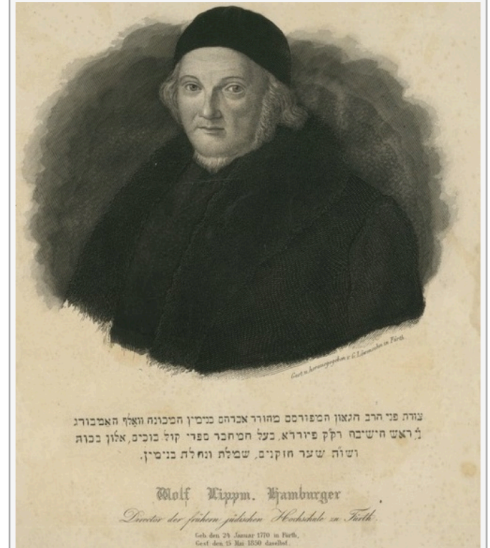
כ"ז באלול תק"ס

רבי אברהם בינג



מצבת קברו, בבית העלמין היהודי בפרבר הוכברג (גר'), וירצבורג.

אברהם בנימין זאב המבורג



לידה 24 בינואר 1770

כ"ז בטבת תק"ל

פירודא, ממלכת בוואריה

פטירה 1850 (בגיל 79 בערך)

ד' בסיוון תרי"ו

פירודא

גרמניה

מדינה מקום פעילות

בוואריה

משולם זלמן הכהן

רבותיו תלמידיו

יצחק דב הלוי במברג, דוד איינהורן

אברהם בינג

בני דורו חיבוריו

שער הזקנים

I dwell in complete isolation (obscurity) without a teacher or a companion in this land whose atmosphere is not conducive to wisdom; all religious questions (*shaalos*) are brought to me for solution. I have to carry the full load on my shoulders and have to assume the authority to render decisions in Halachic questions in both private and public matters.

And one more thing I wish to disclose to you my revered master and teacher . . . and my soul weepeth in the dark on account of it, namely, that the character of religious life in this land is on the lowest level; most of the people are eating non-Kosher food, are violating the *Shabbos* in public . . . and there are thousands who have been assimilated among the non-Jewish population, and have married non-Jewish women. Under these circumstances, my mind is perplexed and I wonder whether a Jew may live in a land such as this.

Nevertheless in my own home — thank G-d — I conduct myself as I did in days of old in my native country. I study Torah day and night, and my devoted and G-d fearing wife is always standing by and

helping me with all her strength, in spite of privation and difficulties. Yet in spite of all this, life has lost all meaning here on account of the irreverence and low estate of our people. Alas, therefore, my master and teacher, impart to me of your wisdom, and let me have your august opinion in the matter; for often times I have made up my mind to leave and go from here to Paris and to put my trust in the good Lord.⁸

1840: No qualified rabbis in the country at all; yet thousands of Jews were living in the United States, and every boat brought new arrivals.

. . . A perfect set-up for charlatans.

GIANTS OF TRADITION

Israel Tabak

The trail-blazing contributions of Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore are evaluated in this essay by Baltimore's distinguished Dr. Tabak, who has been Rabbi of Congregation Shaarei Zion for over three decades. Rabbi Tabak, who received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University, has occupied many important posts on the national scene, including the presidency of the Rabbinical Council of America. Presently he is chairman of the executive committee of the Religious Zionists of America. He is the author of several books, among them his well-known *Heine and his Heritage*.

RABBI ABRAHAM RICE OF BALTIMORE:

Pioneer of Orthodox Judaism in America

<http://www.theoccident.com/>

THE OCCIDENT AND AMERICAN JEWISH ADVOCATE

Gradually, however, he made peace with the situation and continued to minister to the needs of the growing community of Baltimore. He found a great deal of comfort in his association with Isaac Leeser, who was a Torah-loving Jew and dedicated himself to the establishment of Orthodox Judaism in America. It was Leeser also who urged his colleague to express his views in the columns of *The Occident*, which they founded together. This periodical, established in 1843, was one of the most vital instruments for Jewish culture in America and was, as a leading historian put it, "a powerful factor in the raising of the spiritual and intellectual level of American Jewish life in the nineteenth century."⁴

The Occident was important not alone as a cultural medium, but as a vital factor for the preservation of traditional Judaism in this country. It was an intellectual arena where the pioneering spirits in America gave vent to their feelings, and where Isaac Leeser and Abraham Rice and their contemporaries appeared as the defenders of the faith and as guardians of the Jewish heritage.

Although Leeser was the editor of *The Occident*, he gave space in his columns to the protagonists of Reform Judaism, thus establishing his periodical as objective and non-sectarian in the eyes of all classes of Jews in this country. At the same time, Leeser as editor and Rabbi Rice as contributor were ever ready to challenge unorthodox ideas and to defend the position of authentic Judaism with forthrightness and skill. They became friends and comrades in this ideological struggle, and men like David Einhorn and Isaac M. Wise found them to be formidable opponents.

As the community grew, and the rate of immigration increased, his field of operation became wider in scope. In 1845, he founded the first Hebrew School in America. It was the same year that the first Synagogue to be built in Baltimore was dedicated by Rabbi Rice, together with a visiting Rabbi from New York. It was the Synagogue known for many years as the Lloyd Street Shul, and which after many vicissitudes came to be the home of the Shomrei Mishmeres Ha-Kodesh Congregation. The Jewish Historical Society of Maryland, in fact, recently acquired this edifice, presently situated in a non-Jewish neighborhood, with the aim of dedicating it as a historical shrine and a landmark of architectural beauty.⁵

That new Synagogue must have given Rabbi Rice a deep sense of pride, as it was designed by an eminent architect, a specialist in the field of church architecture, who designed several famous religious edifices in Maryland.

The account of the dedication of Baltimore's first Synagogue is very touchingly portrayed in *The Occident*.⁶

According to the report, Rabbi Rice dealt in that sermon with the basic concepts of prayer according to the best traditions of Judaism. He dwelt on the significance of prayer and particularly public worship, and on prayer as "the duty of the heart." He pointed out that true prayer must be accompanied by deep humility, "a self-judging of the mortal before the creator." He emphasized, moreover, that the Synagogue was not only a religious center, but a social center as well.

His interpretation of social consciousness, however, was altogether different from the present-day meaning of the term. It was the classical sense of *Arevut* (responsibility) on the part of a Jew for the moral and spiritual welfare of his fellow Jew. The

Synagogue was the proper environment, Rice insisted, where one Jew could inspire and induce his fellow Jew to lead a more just and righteous life, to reach greater heights of perfection, and thus serve as an example of God's Chosen People, "where brother should meet with brother in order to inspire him to go forward in the path of righteousness."⁷

The new Synagogue, however, created new problems. It attracted leaders who were subject to the influence of the Reform movement. They began with demands for minor innovations, but in the opinion of Rabbi Rice these innovations were symptoms of a new and dangerous tendency. The joy he experienced when he dedicated his beloved "Stadt Shul" was soon dissipated by conflicts and dissension.

Under the heading "Erroneous Doctrines," Rabbi Rice comes to grips with the major issues of the assimilationist movement. Although it was rampant chiefly in Europe at the time, he warned his people of the impending danger they were facing here in their new country. "Though the great ocean divides us from Europe, the onward flight of such ideas is more rapid than that of the eagle; and whilst we imagine that the fire rages only in a distant country, the sparks scattered from the burning are already kindling a flame in our own dwellings."⁹

He complains with great bitterness that the Reform movement is spear-headed not by the common man, "that our chiefs and Rabbis, under the cover of the passions, are absolutely endeavoring to force false doctrines upon the people; so that the common man who cannot think farther than what stands clearly before him is induced to doubt whether these men will not carry their measures so far, that our holy religion will have to suffer a great change."¹⁰ He does not hesitate to denounce these leaders in the strongest terms and refers to them in the scathing words of the prophet. "They who destroy thee and they who pull thee down have come forth from thy midst."¹¹

He endeavors to explain, moreover, the motives of the Reformers; and he does this not by name-calling or invective but on ideological grounds: "You will perhaps ask: what induces these men all at once to disturb with so much violence our holy religion, the inheritance of our fathers?" And he goes on to give his answer:

These men see the great abyss which separates us from the other nations and draw thence the conclusion that we can form a friendly alliance with the world only by throwing off our religion, and assimilating with the nations of the earth. They wish, therefore, that we should exchange the Heavenly treasure which we have received as a gift from our Father in Heaven for worldly and worthless goods; they wish, so to speak, to anticipate the Deity, and to improve the political condition of our brothers at the expense of our religion, as though God, through the faith which he has given us, were the only obstacle why we are not placed on an equality with other nations . . .¹²

But is not the welfare of His children as precious in the eyes of the Almighty as it is in the eyes of the Reformers? Certainly when the time will come, Providence will liberate us from the yoke of our enemies, but not before that day has come: so long as the Omniscient does not deem the age ripe for our elevation, so long will all human exertions be vain and fruitless labor . . . Alone, as our adored God in Heaven, do we stand before the face of the world unshaken in our faith for thousands of years; and alone we thus must remain; and even if mountains tumble into heaps, or valleys will be raised, we will remain and our holy religion will endure unimpaired, notwithstanding the assaults of its enemies.¹³

The most eloquent plea in that essay is the one for unity in the ranks of Israel. The Jewish people, he claims, have been one people only by virtue of a common belief. So long as they adhered to one religion they were a united people. History bears undisputed testimony to this principle. There never were two denominations or two sects in Jewry. There may have been attempts to create such sects, but they were not successful in the light of history. Those rivulets that strayed from the main stream of Jewish tradition trickled for a while, but soon became muddy and polluted. The majestic river of Torah, however, flowed for many centuries down the course of history, and remained ever pure and unsullied:

The only and legitimate pride which the Jew bears in his heart is, that with us there are no sects, that the Jew in the East is like the one who lives in the West — that the religion in the South must be as it is in the North. This unity may be lost through a single ill-advised alteration; every ignorant man would daringly attempt to modify the religion according to the notions of his feeble intellect; and there would arise a multitude of sects without any parallel. But no! O God, Thy name is one and Thy people Israel will remain one.¹⁴

The splendid English translation of Isaac Leeser, the first authentic translation of the Bible in America, was the direct result of Abraham Rice's inspiration.

There is nothing more important for the Jews in this land. As long as German is in power here, I know only too well that our children will not learn religion, for the children have no taste for German . . . By doing this you will be able to gain eternal life for your soul.¹⁸

A grave problem which the Jewish community in the United States was faced with was the lack of religious authority. Most of the men who served as spiritual leaders were not authentic rabbis in the European tradition; they were known as ministers and were primarily cantors, *shochetim*, or Hebrew teachers. Those who claimed to be "rabbis" were not the Talmudic scholars of the caliber of Rabbi Rice, who studied Torah under men of the school of the saintly Rabbi Nathan Adler, and Rabbi Mosheh Sopher (*Chatam Sofer*), giants of Torah of their day.

The lack of Halakhic authorities in this land was the cause of serious misunderstandings, especially in those areas which called for expert knowledge of the Law. Thus Rabbi Rice started a movement for the establishment of a nation-wide "*Beth Din*" (a recognized tribunal of Jewish Law) which would be headed by a universally recognized scholar from Europe, and would be vested with full authority in matters of *Halakhah*.

In a Letter to the Editor he said: "I urge upon the Jews in the United States the great importance of selecting a spiritual head of a *Beth Din* for the purpose of regulating all our spiritual affairs, and before whom all religious questions might be brought for decision. It surely is necessary to prevent the uninitiated from giving their crude decisions which are but too well calculated to do permanent injury to our faith."¹⁹

תשובת עגדת בית און *

בראשית ו-ארכה א' לאל ומכיס בקורנס ברזל עם
הכלי על הצנאר צעורק הוורידין המכוון מול הובט
ואם לא יכוונו מעשיהם בראשונה ישנו וישלשו ומניח'
לזוד דכ רב מזה עד שיעבור דם הקלוח ומתחיל להיות
שוחח טיף טיף ואז יודעים הנוה כי מחל בן הכשר
ומהר יסחמו הנקב כהדבק המוכן לזה, למען לא
ימוח העגל חמת ידם. וכמה מהם מתיב בשעה או
שחים אחר הדקירה והקזה, ואח"כ כשמניחין אותה
היא נחלבת עד שלריכים להעמיד אותה וכמעט
שאיננה יכולה לילך, ואינה אוכלת מני אז, ואחר
איזה שעות או למחרת היום שוחט אותה בשוחט.
ואין פוצה פה ומלפף. אף כי לכמה שוחטי האשכנזי'
הי' לזרה צעיניהם עד בגבר יד אחד מהמחיריים
ונמשכו אבחריה. ויש מהשוחטים אשר נגע ירעה
אלקים

לקדם מינא ורבנא נפשי בשאלתי
הנה כאשר החטה אותי אלקים, לבוא לעיר
נייאיראק מלאתי שכל העם אוכלים, בשר
העגלים המדוקרים איזה שעות קודם שחיטתם או
ציוס שלפני השחיטה, וגוף הענין הכי הוא בעיר
הגדולה הלא הנכרים-הקלבים, או אף אוחס בצבם
ישראל יכונו ומחללים שנת צפרהס'יא כמה ונעריהם
וכל הנמלא שמה, הכל כאשר לכל כמה מוכנים לזה
כדי שהא בשר לבן ונח, ועושים כמה ככה לכל
העגלים בכל הזמנים הן בחורף והן בקיץ, הן לאוחס
אשר ישחטו והן לאוחס אשר הנוה מונבלים בעלמם
למכרם לנכרי, ויש להם כלי כהול חי לזה אורך
הכלי הלו לא פחות מאורך שן מפחת גדול ורחבו
הוא כפלים ולה שתי פיות חדה משסי כדי ועוקן

(ד)

ממעני

משה



אלקים בלבם אשר לא ישמעו לקול היחירו ולא ישמעו העגלים המדוקרים המה ללעג ולקלס בעיני הקלבים וגם מחוסרי מחי' כי גם שארי בהמות לא יניחו לנו לשחוט : כי יחבב האיש הזה לשוטת ובעיר "באלעימאר" יש שם הרב מוומחה חכם מופלא ר' אברהם רייס נ"י. וגם הוא אשר לכל סביבותיו שומעים בקולו, וגם בעיר הגדולה לינלינאטי • נאשר ג"כ ע"י רבני העיר שהסכימו כולם על האסור וצפה נוהיארק פרלה המכשלה ע"י שנים • דהיינו שוהצ אחד הבא ממדינת פולין אשר הי' לפניו שוחט בק"ק סטאוויסק, ונאשרה שמה שמיטחו ע"י הרב דק"ק "סטאוויסק" • יחד עם רבני המדינה וגאוני הזמן • וקשני לו איש אחד מנחפשו באדרת רבני • ואם הבנים הבינים שמו אשר ההלכו ומעשו בארץ אייראפא מודעת • וכן פה שם עלונו לשר ושושע על האספאןק וחיפש היחר לכל דבר איסור • אשר חתה זאת ישר היא בעיני הסמון • ובמאמר חז"ל כל המיקול וכו' • ובשנת תרי"ח נמלאו חגשים יקרים שנחבו או לחלתי ירכליה וגם עוד לפני רבנים חכמי הזמן והסכימו כולם לאיסור וכחכו שהוא ספק נבלה אך אין בומע לנו או • וכעת אשר אנשי המדרש דקהל עדת ישרון בעיר הלזו שלחו אחריו להיות לנו לרב ומורה ובלתי על חג הסוכות ומעט אשר נפסתי מתלוח גלי הים ומדע לי מענין זה • שאלתי אותם מאין למה לנו ההיחר והראו לי שיש להם מכתב היחר ערב אחד • והוא לא כחב שום פעם וסברא ורק בזה"ל • ובענין העגלים כבר מבוחר התירו כחשובת שני הגאונים בשו"ת ברית אברהם ובשו"ת חכם סיפר ויפה הורו ע"כ • ואנכי לא פניתי להיחר זה • אף כי לא זכיתי לראות השו"ת ברית אברהם אך השו"ת ח"ס לא יבנו ת"י • ואפשר שגשחכש המחיר ע"י רמיית השואל שלא כענין • כי לדעתי הצעירה אין הנידון דומה לדברים • וחיילה לקוני ערנתי לקהלתי שני שוחטים ישרים אשר לא נגאלו בזבח

הפגול הלז • וח"ל כי נאלץ לנו בשר עגל כשר כיאות להאיש הישראלי • וח"ל כי נגדרים אחרינו לאלות מהאשכנזים • וגם רבים מהרופאים אשר לא מבני עמנו הודו והעידו שאינם יכולים לחיות העגלים מני עת הקזה והזגת הדם הרב אשר נתבך יי"ה וימי שרואה זאת באמת אין גם אחד שלא יודע ע"ז שהעגל הנדקר הוא נבלה אף קודם הבחיטה • ולפי שהבט הלז החפילים בחיי החופש שלחו עוד הפעם אל המחיר (לא חרלה להעלות שמו על שפתי) והעטו אוחו שהמדינה הזאת היא חנה לצאוד • וע"כ מוכרחים כל הבהמות להקזה • אבל זה שקר מוחלט כי המדינה הזאת איננה חמה ממדינת פולין • ואין אחד מהב"ה" הגדולות שיהי' מוקזים ונמשכים דם מהם • רק מהעגלים ממשכים הדם בכדי שחיה הבשר לכן וזה • והמחיר הנ"ל השיבס שנית חז"ל כבר כתבתי על ההקזה להיחר כמ"ש בספר ח"ס וברית אברהם ובאמת שם שאי אפשר לבוא בלתי הקזה כי הארץ חמה נוואוד • בודאי אין דנין אפשר נשאי אפשר וביותר אין להכת הלו שום סכרה להיחר ועכ"ז מרעישים המה העולם ובמדינה זו יקר דבר ה' ואין חזון האמת נפרץ • ונביאי השקר מתעים את העם בכזביהם ובהבליהם, לואת אמרתי אנוסה נח לעזר חכמי הדור אשר בארץ אייראפא אשר להם החכמה והמדע • אהבת האמת והלדק והנה אף כי לא ארון אנכי בזה להכריע בין רבותן בתראי ח"ס • והברית אלברס סמיתרים הסקזה להבהמה והפחת הבית ושו"ת רשמי שאלה ושו"ת תפארת לבי האוברים הבהמה המוקזת • אף זאת ארין לפני רבותי • כי ענין איסור העגלים אינו דומה לנידון של הגאוני המחירים ;

קדא ! מפני רבוי הדם היוצא מהבהמה ; ויש לחוש שיצא ממנה דם הנפש • כדאיתא בכריתות דף כ"ב שדם החזקה שהנשמה חלויה בו סבר

זדיקה ונזירות שלא הרכזו ונומן אחר: ג) שיהי משגיח
 לאמן עומד צעח הלקיעה והחצעה, להעיד שלא נחשבו
 צהם אחרונים ויירכזים או נחשדים צחך האחרונים
 הכקיים והנזורים צכשרותם, צלרוף השנחה להפריש מהם
 חרימה ומועקר כרת של חורה, והזחירות מערלה, —
 חגרי היגדה קבלו עליהם למלאות אחרי כל הפרטים
 שררש מהם הרב, ועפיי השנחה צדקי האחרונים של
 הגנות צראשון לזיון השייכים לרי נפחלי הלל, ורי ילחק
 ליצ טאפארטאווקקי, רי צכיומן שייך, רי אהרן ארדכי
 פיינעאן, רי יהודא אידל צללאליכין, והרב נתן להם
 חעודת הכשר, ואחייכ צדקי והכשירו האהריגים צמועצית
 אחרות, — נעיעת האחרונים נעשה עתה לענף נקאר
 הגון צחיי, — רק הלולצים והדקים צחאם דרך היס
 מחקלקלים ונעשים ינשים כחשים וטולצים, וגם הקורים
 אחרוני חיי חוכרו להשתמש צלולצן והדסי חיעליה, —
 אגרת פרי עץ הדב, הפיל הדסיקי חיה מאמדים ציד
 אחרוני חיי צשם מקול צהדרי הגלעד, — אפרים
 דייכארד הוליא לאור קפרו מלחמה לרי צעמלקי (ויאחק
 חרכיב) וקורא אחרוני יון צשם מומחריי מפני שהם
 מורכבים, הוא חסף שוית הרנכים האוסרים אחרוני
 יון (*): —

[אחרוני אמעריקא] האחרונים הראשירים שנאו
 מאמעריקא לאירופא הוצאו מאיי וועקטו חיעריא (איי חרו
 המערבים) והעיד רי ילחק בן חורי זיל וי חליעור
 קורדורא כי הרב רי אגרהם צינג מוירלצורג ותישיש רי
 ישראל דוב קורשידע ארו להלכה למעשה שהם כשרים
 ואינם נחשדים למעוונים חם כלחקו מאנשים הגורים,
 אך הרב רי יעקב עטלינגער מאלבונא צקפרו צכורי
 יעקב (הלי לולב קיי חריא) נקחפק חם יושני אירופא
 יולאין

כי אחרוני חיי סיגור קאן צליא צשם מדע אחרונ מרי יהודא
 הדסים קי צשם מפן הדרי וקוח מפא ונתן של הלכה פיד יחדון
 חרכיו הוליא גם מוים כנאון עלישיש קיל קורא ציחנס הפנכים
 פאן דכריו צכריע מללגי יידי לייכונגי, ממויקי חות, המלטה,
 י וגדולי מריחתי שלישיא, ולא יטל יוסף להחלפק וקבלתי ח
 זני שולם זחל לכל מי שיבקש חכס אין כסף), גם צוילקע יוסף
 להם כפגרה כיל צית מוכר גדול לאחרונים צעיר צודאפעקט
 נפוח לכסופ למחקים ולענה כסם ולנזנו מוון של יבראל לנפלה
 נשרו לכוין ונאמן צנית מוכר סוה, ומליחיש אפרי יעשה רכס
 צעים ולכריות, ורלו לנלעות אוחי חנס צלל מלות, ולמעט פלכי
 סוכל להחפאכ כי עבודתי היי ציה צאמונה מכל נד (ויש צידי
 צרו פרי לעמוד על יעונם, ואם כי קשה עלי פאור להיות לדב
 וקבלתי גם עתה על פכתי לטות להם לפה ולמלין לסייע לדב
 ונעכי נעמי למון חרכר ולהקים אוחה ולקפדה צכל מו, ולפלי
 ו הצמלים צועה חסם למסיות נפסם ונפם עלליהם, ועל חכמי
 ו כחמלים) לכבוד עמלם סם דוכשיי, ושקר אין לו נגלים:

Josef Schwartz aus Bonyhád Czederhändler (t

יולאין צרי ויכין שגדלו צחיי אמעריקא ואיקטוראליא מפני
 סיחכני העריוו האלה רגליהם נגד רגליי וראשיהם
 למענה ואיכ המינים שגדלי שם חם כיוטלין חללני היא
 הסוך מדרך גדילתה, אי חילי כימא כיון שזועל הגדל
 סמוך לארץ לעטה זה מקרי דרך גדולה והכי מכתנר
 (עיי המלין שבת הרמיג גליון פיד), אך הרב הזה לא
 חשש כלל חך ילאו יהודי אמעריקא ידי חיצת הוויכין
 הצאים ואירופא הוילי שאינם יכוילן לקחת אזהרת דרך
 גדילתם, — צשנות החנשים הציוי האריגים מקליפארייא
 וצפרע מנני לאם חנגיליכ והם מהדדים ומונחרים צלצויים
 ומכרים צול כווי ליערווין, כאלר הוצאו האחרונים
 האלה לכויראק אקרים הרנכים האוהודוקסיי מפני חשש
 חרכנה, רק הרב רי אגרהם רייס מוטלעימור הכשרים
 כי לדעתו רוני האחרונים ללקחים מהיערות שגדלו שם
 כווי חילי כרק צעקוס קלא צא ארס לחרות ולנעויע
 אוחה, עיי חילי צחיר חם לא שרע צצירור שהם
 מורכבים (השויצוה הי סיון חרי: צעמון חכיל), רי מנחס
 צרי ליצ גאלדשמיט השייב על דכריו שרחי לנחון ולצדוק
 מקודם חם הם מורכבים או לא, ואין לצדק עליהם צכחם
 עד שיראם לחכס יצקי צסימניהם וימכרם צחוקה כשרות:

גבעת — סימן רכיג — פנחס
 (המשך בקינשרס כיא סיי ריי)

(הי) **בסימן ניה** (מחצת הי) הציא להקחפק צסם סי
 חנוכה יהודא (יעיי) צמהרים פיק על חריג
 מלות סיי קיל חות צי) חם אחר גול מחזירו פחוח
 משרים וחור וגול פחוח משרים חם מלרפין להיות צדין
 הקנה עייט, ולעריד חוי: יל עפוימש חכריי צחורו
 קיי לעכין שוחפין שחצנו לאיש אי דחייב להם מוון
 הכוחפות שרים דציד הקקין לדין זה חייג דלכל אי
 מהני שוחפיי חלי פרוטה שאי: הכא דמוון אי הוא
 עסק הכוחפות וכחד גכרא השויצא וציד חקקין להם
 ישיש (ועיי) צחורה מליון סנה צכייס חוצרות גי סיון
 יוד, ודריק, —

ואנב חליע מוה פריחיי צסי שרה חור (מערכת רי
 אייכס קיי גי חות פיו) דנקחפק צגנב לולב
 ואחייכ קיים מלית השצח אצידה אי ילא או הי גיכ
 מלהצני, והציא שם צסם סי קרצן חליטר דאף חחיל
 דלח מהגי עחילח חנגול למייסוייה פלו למפרע, עיע
 חם צא צדעים צפררע פרעוית דווי הלולב וחי פייס צווי
 מהגי עייט, וצוה יש לייצב קושיי החוסי (קוכה לי)
 דלמיל לכס חיל דהיי מלהצני, דלריכיס לכס צחם נכ
 והסיו חת הגזילה דוולהצניע ליה חכל לכס לא מקרי, (ועיי
 פריס ציה כשחלי סיון חיה) ודריק, —



Baltimore, 18th December, 1843.

Rev. I. Leiser,

Respected friend—You know how much I am interested in every development of our religion, and how much I should wish to restore the genuine light of Talmudic authority; but the little acquaintance I have with the English language is the only reason why I cannot defend my opinions before the community. But having seen a part of the subject discussed in two late numbers of the *Occident*, by the [Rev. Mr. Carillon](#) and [Mr. Henry Goldsmith](#), I am induced to break my silence, and to speak on the matter as well as I can in a language new and foreign to me. Neither of the two learned gentlemen has taken notice of the preface of Maimonides to the Mishnah, where he illustrates this subject in plain terms. He says, "that the Talmud must be divided in five parts:

"First. Laws and explanations of laws which have been transmitted from Moses with reference to Scriptural passages; all such are unquestionably divine.

"Second. Oral laws without Scriptural reference, which we call *הלכה למשה מסיני* which are also divine.

"Third. Laws deduced by explanations from the Scriptures in accordance with out Scriptural logic *ג' מדות* *י"ג* *שהתורה נדרשת בהן*; all such are not immediately divine, and we find, therefore, that many such questions are debated in the Talmud, and the decision was obtained through the vote of the majority.

"Fourth. Institutions and ordinances *גזירות* of Prophets and Rabbis, intended to act as a hedge around the vineyard of the Lord, *כדי לעשות סייג לתורה*, these are from their very nature not divine; and

"Fifth. Customs, *תקונים ומנהגים*; but many of these customs are doubtlessly transmitted from Moses himself. (See *Berachot*, fol. 48.; *Megillah*, fol. 4."

I believe that these illustrations of Maimonides are the only true defence against the invaders of Talmudic authority. Such passages as *מדרשים* and *הגדות* (allegorical comments upon Holy Writ and legends) are not points of law, and have nothing to do with this question; but the learned men in Israel know very well that in the *הגדות* (legends) are contained treasured of wisdom, of which the unbeliever cannot form a proper estimate.

Should you find that this crude essay is deserving of publicity, and think it worthy a place in the *Occident*, it is at your service; and you will find me always prepared to defend our religion as far as my want of acquaintance with the language of the country will permit me. I am very respectfully yours,

A. Rice.

The endeavors of Mr. Goldsmith, to prove the divine authority of the Talmud, are praiseworthy in so far as they show his adherence to that compendium of laws; but in my humble opinion, it is as dangerous to enlarge the limits of Talmudic authority, as infidelity itself. The reason for this opinion cannot be better supported than from the letter of Mr. G. itself. He says, "There is no juste milieu; the Talmud is divine, or it is not entitled to authority." This conclusion must appear erroneous to every man who has studied the Talmud in a proper manner.

On the contrary, the Talmud is entitled to authority, though every part of it is not divine. But the question: "Who gives the Rabbis the right to make laws?" is answered in the Talmud itself. (Tractate *Sabbath*, fol. 23.) The Talmud takes up the question: "How can we say in our blessings when performing a Rabbinical ordinance (מצות דרבנן) אשר קדשנו במצותיו ויצונו (who hath sanctified us with His commandments and hath commanded us'), when in no place in the law is there such an ordinance as the Talmudical law of lighting the lamps on the Festival of Dedication (נר הנוכה) or the reading of the Book of Esther on Purim enjoined by the Almighty?" To which it is answered, that we are specially commanded in Deut. xvii 11: "According to the law which they (the teachers) shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they will say unto thee shalt thou do, thou shalt not depart from the thing which they will tell thee to the right or to the left." Here the Lord requires of us to follow the laws which our Rabbis may make, and all Rabbinical ordinances (מצות דרבנן) possess divine authority only in so far as the injunction "Thou shalt not depart" (לא תסור) extends. This is the true juste milieu which Mr. G. has perhaps from inexperience in the correct Talmudical exegesis denied to the Talmud.

The same is maintained by Maimonides, in his preface to his *Yad Hachazakah*: "All institutions and ordinances of the Rabbis are enjoined by the Lord, so that we may not depart from them, by His holy word which maintains, Thou shalt not depart, etc."

This authority to make ordinances has ceased with the close of the Talmud, when the Israelites became more scattered in small numbers all over the world, and there lived no longer masses of a thousand learned men in one place, as it was in the earlier times, when all the doctors who taught in the spirit of the Talmud, lived in the Holy Land or its vicinity. Maimonides says, therefore, that "Institutions and ordinances since then adopted by any בית דין (ecclesiastical tribunal,) have never been able to receive the universal sanction in Israel, as was the case with the enactments recorded in the Talmud.

Upon the whole, I cannot understand Mr. G.'s views, that either "the Talmud is divine or is not entitled to authority." Such an assertion would bring us upon absurdities, or lead us to reject all obligation of its contents. Is the second day of festivals a divine law? Surely not; still we claim that the Talmud had the right to make such a law, and that the people could not reject it from the principle of לא תסור "Thou shalt not depart," (see Maimonides, *Hilchot Kiddush Hachodesh*, chap. v *Halakhah* 6; and *Sepher Hachinuck*, *Mitzvah* 496,) and there are many hundreds of ordinances where the Talmud proceeds upon the same authority.

When Mr. G. says, that "the views of Maimonides cannot be quoted in evidence of the truth of tradition," I beg him to remember the aphorism חכמים הזהרו בדבריכם "Wise men, take care what you say;"

and not contradict so hastily the opinions of the great luminary of Israel. Rabbi Abraham ben David, the great and learned Rabad, says of him: "He has accomplished an immense work, to condense the whole of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, and the Toseftas," (*Hilkhot Kilayim*, Chap. vi H. 2); we therefore should take care to express our opinions with humility, so as not to oppose ourselves without great cause to the wisdom of this enlightened spirit.

With reference to the letter of Mr. Marks, I will merely tell him that his ironical question will hardly weaken the authority of the Talmud, for he has not comprehended the spirit of the Talmudical interpretation. He ought to have known that the recommendation of early marriages applies only to the climate of the Holy Land, where puberty occurs earlier than in colder countries (see *Eben Ezra*).

Again, with regard to intoxication on Purim, he has not truly understood the meaning of the text. The Talmud wishes to teach allegorically, that we ought to consider whether the elevation of Mordecai (ברוך מרדכי) or the sudden fall of Haman (ארוך המן) was the greatest miracle, (or in other words, that in rejoicing over the success of Israel, in escaping from the danger which so fearfully threatened them, we should be careful not to curse with the bitterness of hate, those who endeavoured to work our destruction); and surely such a construction will harmonize with the general principles of the Rabbis who worked for the glorification of the name of God, than the ironical remarks of Mr. Marks. — Your obedient servant, A. Rice.²⁴

You, as a thinking Rabbi, try to maintain that it will be no more in consonance with the present age to interpret our religion according to the Talmudical decisions. Indeed! The heavens may vanish in smoke, and the earth wear out with old age, and still not one iota will vanish from our religion. Can you recollect Daniel's dream where we read: I looked in the night, and behold there was a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly; and it had ten horns. If "ten horns" of the beast have not been able to effect anything, let "one horn"* dare to try his strength... And in the same manner will

* (Play on the German word "Einhorn")

the false enlightenment of the new men and the newest times assail it and exhaust its strength in vain. So soon as we yield the Talmud, Judaism has no more any foothold to stand on, for every one would build an idolatrous altar for himself.

Let us return thanks to the God of Heaven for the blessing of religious liberty which we enjoy here, and perform all religious duties from love and respect for religion. But we will not regard the restrictions which our faith imposes on us as a "yoke" which rests on our shoulders; on the contrary, we will labor therein perseveringly, and this in perfect freedom, until the time of the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction, the period when "Thou wilt grant the truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham." Your friend, Abraham Rice. Baltimore, November 16th, 5616 (1856).²⁷

Rabbi Rice continued to gain in stature as a leader, and his influence in the community increased with time. But in his personal life, there was little improvement. His economic situation was deplorable as before. In a letter to a friend he complained of the fact that he had to teach young children daily from morning till noon, a task which became increasingly difficult for his state of health.

What must have been a source of keen satisfaction to him, was a decision by the leaders of Congregation Nidchei Yisroel, to call him back to the pulpit of his erstwhile Congregation. Isaac

Leeser urged him to accept this call, and wrote to him saying: "We know of no one in the country on whose shoulders the dignity of Rabbi could be more fittingly placed."²⁸

But, alas, this call came too late. His health was already inordinately poor. While being pleased by the fact that people from all walks of life flocked to listen to him, he complained of being unequal to the task of preaching. The meticulous preparation of his sermons was too strenuous for him, as his heart was already weak at the time. The duration of his second term of service in the pulpit lasted barely a few months—from June to October 1862. It seems that the Congregation was destined to hear his exhortations once more during the High Holy Days. For after the Holy Days of that year he was summoned to his eternal reward and was "gathered unto his people."

His passing left a great void not only in the community of Baltimore but in the country at large. For he was one of the few genuine Torah scholars in this country who could take his place with the great Talmudic sages who held sway in Europe in his generation. The eulogies of his contemporaries were glowing with praise. Even his antagonists spoke with true veneration of his erudition and sincerity. Men like David Einhorn with whom he carried on a life-long controversy regarding the authenticity of Talmudic Judaism and other matters, spoke of him in terms of highest regard. It was not only in matters of religion, but also in political problems such as the question of slavery which Rice and Einhorn had differed, Einhorn was later compelled to leave Baltimore, for his views on the subject proved to be rather unpopular.

The resolution adopted by Rabbi Rice's Congregation on his demise reads in part: "His constant and firm adherence to his well-known principles and professions gained for him not only the confidence and esteem of those who shared his views, but also commanded from those who differed from him the respect and admiration which a consistent life will never fail to obtain." In addition the Congregation voted to grant a pension to the widow to the extent of \$300.00 a year.²⁹

The Editor of *Occident* devoted a full editorial to the memory of Rabbi Rice in which he said in part: "He was a native of Bavaria and trained in the College of the eminent Rabbi Abra-

ham Bing, a disciple of Rabbi Nathan Adler . . . He brought with him the reputation of a thorough Talmudist, which he maintained in a preeminent degree among all who have reached America since his arrival, being still the first among many able and learned men in his department."³⁰

בולטימור. הדור המבוגר בבולטימור עדיין אמון היה על מורשתו מה'בית הישן', ועדיין שכיחים היו בעיר ת"ח ויודעי-ספר רבים. דמויותיהם הנעלות של רא"ג והג"ר מיכל פורשלגר זצ"ל שדר בה, ⁸¹ הוסיפו גם הם הוד והדר לתורה. העיר השתבחה בבתי מדרשות רבים, שכללו מספר לא מבוטל של "חברות ש"ס", ⁸² ובין כותליהם התקיימו שיעורים ולימודים שונים בשעות הערב. ⁸³

ואולם הפער בין הדור הישן לחדש, שאפיין כמעט כל משפחה יהודית באמריקה, ניכר לא פחות גם בבולטימור. תרמה לכך במיוחד העובדה שהורים רבים רשמו את ילדיהם כתלמידים בבתי-הספר הציבוריים, מתוך אי-מודעות משוועת לאיום שנשקף מכך ליהדותם. את החסר אמרו ההורים להשלים בשיעורי-יהדות פרטיים בשעות אחה"צ המאוחרות, כשהילדים כבר מותשים מיום רווי פעילות. בהיעדרם של מוסדות חינוך המציעים תוכנית לימוד תורנית מלאה, פשתה הבערות בקרב הצעירים ואף בנים לאבות ת"ח נותרו בורים מכל קניין רציני בתורה. וכך נוצר פער בלתי-נמנע בין ההורים דובר

81 ר"מ הוסמך לרבנות מרבו המובהק, הג"ר אברהם ברונשטיין זצ"ל מסוכטשוב, בעל אבני נזר, וכאזרח פרטי ללא משרה רשמית גר בבולטימור והגה יומם ולילה בתלמודו ובכתיבת חידושו. לסבר את האוזן בדבר שיעור קומתו התורנית של ר"מ, די לציין שראשות ישיבת חכמי לובלין הוצעה לו אחרי פטירתו של מחוללה הג"ר מאיר שפירא זצ"ל. [אמנם, ר"מ דחה את ההצעה, מכיון שבני משפחתו סירבו לחזור לפולניה]. את קשריו עם מעריציו ניצל ר"מ לגיוס תמיכה כספית לישיבה. מסופר, שבתקופת מלחמת העולם השנייה, בה שרר בבולטימור מחסור בסוכר, הופיע ר"מ יום אחד בביתו של רבינו עם שק מלא סוכר עבור הישיבה (הג"ר קאהן). רבינו העריך את ר"מ ביותר, עד שהתבטא עליו בפני תלמידים שהוא מחשיבו כאחד ממוריו הרוחניים, ופעמים היה רבינו צועד למעלה משעה לצידה המזרחי של בולטימור כדי לבקרו. (הרב מנשה להמן).

82 כותב המאמר ביקר לפני כעשרים וחמש שנים בבניין הישן והמט-ליפול של ה"רוסישע שוהל", ומנה 103 שסיים בארונות הספרים המתנשאים לגובהם ומתפרסים לאורכם של כותלי הביהכ"נ.

83 דמותה הרחית החיובית של בולטימור נזקפת לא במעט גם לזכותו של רבה של הקהילה הראשונה בה, הג"ר אברהם רייס זצ"ל (תק"ס-תרכ"ב), שנחשב בצדק כרב האותנטי הראשון באמריקה בכלל. ר"א קיבל תורה בישיבותיה ומפי גדוליה של מדינת באוואריה, ובהזמנת הקהילה היהודית הראשונה בבולטימור, שהורכבה מיוצאי גרמניה, נתמנה כרבה. רובה של הקהילה התרכו בביהכ"נ "שארית ישראל", שהיה הביהכ"נ היחיד בו נתקבלו כחברים אך ורק שומרי שבת. (כמה מבין חברי הקהילה, וכיניהם איש העסקים המלומד והידוע ר' נתן אדלר, נעשו תומכים חשובים של הישיבה). ר"א עמד בגאון ובעוז להגן על שמירת התורה והדת בקרב בני קהילתו, אך למרבה הצער נסחפו רבים מהם - יחד עם בתי הכנסת עליהם נמנו - ברוחות הרפורמה שנשבו ועקרו כל חלקה טובה. למרות שלא תמיד הצליח להציל את כולם, חרט ר"א רושם בל ימחה על יהודי עירו, ואף אלו שלא נותרו דתיים רחשו בזכותו כבוד לדת ישראל ולערכיה, כך שהשפעתו הברוכה של ר"א עדיין הוכרה בבולטימור של שנות השלושים.

בבולטימור התקיימה גם חבורה מצומצמת אך פעילה, שהורכבה מילדיהם של המהגרים המבוגרים ממזרח אירופה - שהתארגנה ללחום וליצור תעמולה חברתית ליהדות התורנית. חבורה זו נודעה בשם "עדת בני ישראל", ובראש פעילותה הציעה מסגרת חברתית לצעירים ולצעירות שחפצו בשמירת שבת - החלטה נועזת וקשה שהבדילה אותם מהקהילה הרחבה. חבריה של "עדת בני ישראל" הצטיינו גם בתמיכתם בישיבה ואף כתלמידים בה.