

EINHORN AND SZOLD: TWO LIBERAL GERMAN RABBIS IN BALTIMORE

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Racial and religious minorities have a tendency to close ranks, to maintain inflexible dogmas, as long as pressure exists from without. Any slackening of this pressure automatically relaxes their attitude. The history of the Jews is a case in point. The fluctuations between the rigid and the liberal in their customs and religious tenets follow mostly the ups and downs of the history of freedom itself.

For three centuries the Jewish people were crowded into ghettos. They led an alien, confined life and spoke a peculiar language. They were, at least in Central Europe, refused a share in the progress of the outside world, yet they had nevertheless to suffer the consequences of universal disasters. During the centuries of oppression Jewish faith and ritual remained essentially unchanged. If a man from the early Middle Ages had visited a temple in the eighteenth or even in the nineteenth century, he would have found himself completely at home. This was the only spot where the world had stood still. The Jewish community had clung to rigid forms as the only armour against attacks from the Christian world.

In 1779, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote his drama *Nathan the Wise*. He invested his Jewish hero with all those virtues of wisdom, goodness and tolerance which he found so conspicuously wanting in his Christian contemporaries. Everyone participating in the intellectual life of Germany at that time knew that the man portrayed by Lessing was Moses Mendelssohn. His name had already gained wide respect. All the literary circles discussed and admired his endeavours to free the Jews from their spiritual ghetto by explaining German cultural achievements to them. Some Jewish leaders began to see that their partly imposed, partly voluntary spiritual exile was leading them to spiritual stagnation.

Enlightened men tried to translate the spirit of tolerance into practical rules and laws. In 1781, Christian Wilhelm Dohm published his book *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (On the Civic Improvement of the Jews). He advocated complete professional freedom for the Jews, the right to engage in the arts and sciences and stated courageously that the so-called Jewish shortcomings were solely the result of their political status. This work, which became a classic, was widely read and discussed. This was one of the first steps on the long and tortuous road toward emancipation.

Alexander von Humboldt had publicly demanded unconditional equality for the Jews. Karl August von Hardenberg, Prussia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, had stated that he would not vote for any law regarding Jews which would not contain the four words: equal duties, equal rights. In 1812, King Frederick William III. of Prussia decreed that the Jews henceforth were Prussian citizens. After the victorious conclusion of the War of Liberation, 1815, their new social gains were threatened again. This time the attack came not from the conservative side but from the *Burschenschaften*, a German student organisation founded in 1815 with the laudable goal of

enobling the spirit of German universities and of upholding freedom and the Christian faith. Soon however its lofty ideals deteriorated. The *Burschenschaften* became imbued with the boisterous spirit of Turnvater Jahn. His emphasis on the bodily fitness of German youth had certainly been a great contribution in winning the war against Napoleon, but his narrowminded nationalism was a sinister influence in the years that followed. The *Burschenschaften* proclaimed they were upholding Christian ideals while they ignored Christian kindness and tolerance. The movement was not confined to students. University professors took the lead in denouncing the Jews as an alien element in the national body. In Jena, the philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries who was closely connected with the organisation, demanded the extermination of the Jews, "root and branch," because they seemed to him dangerous to the state. The historian Christian Friederich Rühls, in Berlin, urged the enactment of restrictions which closely resembled the Nuremberg laws of ill fame. The Jews of Hamburg, Bremen and Frankfurt were deprived of their citizenship by a legal trick, Lübeck expelled forty families and Bremen the entire Jewish population. In 1819 Jews were openly persecuted in Franconia and Hesse. These are only a few examples taken at random, but they prove that by 1847 the Jews in many states of Germany had fewer rights than they had had in 1812.

The events of 1848 brought about a change. Jewish intellectuals fought side by side with Jung-Deutschland against the numerous Metternichs who, in the service of their petty princes, tried to outdo their master in Vienna. The German National Assembly in Frankfurt declared that religious adherence was not a condition or an obstacle to civil rights. This declaration was adopted by the individual states and made part of the drafts for the new constitutions. Four members of the Frankfurt Parliament were of the Jewish faith, a fact resented by many a die-hard Conservative.

When the uprising of 1848 and 1849 failed, Jewish liberals were persecuted mercilessly. Their names appeared with those of Christian liberals on the various blacklists which were circulated from capital to capital. At that time, Jewish newspapers openly encouraged the Jews to emigrate to America. The new continent appeared a haven for the oppressed Jews of Central Europe. In Vienna, Isidor Bush, a printer and publisher, and other prominent men formed a committee to further Jewish emigration. Its activity however ended abruptly when Bush was forced to flee to the United States where he later became an outstanding member of the German-American community in St. Louis.

Meanwhile the Jewish attitude toward the Christian world had changed. The disappearance of the ghetto, the new concessions, the growing participation in German public life and, last but not least, the rationalistic temper of the times began to undermine Jewish traditional belief. Some turned to Protestantism. Others, unable to find solace in another faith, foreswore religion altogether and became freethinkers. Religious Jewish leaders were alarmed and tried to stop this sudden flight from Judaism by embarking upon the great task of reform. They attempted in fact to occidentalize Jewish services. The prayershawl disappeared from many synagogues, the ark was replaced by the altar, prayers were translated into German, and German standards of religious music were introduced. Even the architectural form of the synagogue underwent slight changes. It resembled henceforth a Christian church where people of both sexes sat facing the pulpit.

In some communities reforms went so far as almost to obliterate the Jewish character of the religious service. As with all reform movements,

the pendulum was to swing the other way, but the discussion how far reforms should go, raged for almost thirty years.

There was a similar development in America. The Jewish ritual had been translated into English in 1766 with the purpose of extending the influence of the synagogue to those who were ignorant of Hebrew. Jewish reformers in Charleston, South Carolina, demanded in 1824 that portions of the service be read in English. However the real impetus for reform was brought about by the numerous Jewish immigrants who arrived from Germany in the thirties and forties. In 1840, the Jewish population of Baltimore, Maryland consisted of two hundred families, mostly immigrants from Germany. Their rabbi was Abraham Rice, a learned Talmudist who made Baltimore a stronghold of traditional Judaism. Two years later, in protest against the rabbi's orthodoxy, several members seceded from the congregation. They constituted the Har Sinai Verein and founded a reform congregation. The changes in the ritual of this new congregation went even further than what the boldest reformers had proposed in Germany. Not only were the services held on Sunday, but the dietary laws were ignored and the members demanded that the rabbi discuss in his sermons everyday worldly problems.

After more than a decade of precarious existence the Congregation was able to afford the services of a permanent rabbi. In 1855 they appealed to liberal David Einhorn whose synagogue in Budapest had just been closed by order of an intolerant Austrian government.

Dr. Einhorn was a remarkable man. He was born in Dispeck, Bavaria, in 1809 and received his rabbinical diploma at the age of seventeen from the Rabbinical School of Fürth. This school dated from the sixteenth century and was known for its extreme orthodoxy. Its teaching staff consisted almost entirely of Polish rabbis who had to fight for survival in chauvinistic Poland. They were uncompromising and strongly opposed to modern ideas. Einhorn, a promising disciple and a protégé of Rabbi Wolf Hamburger defied his teachers. Forsaking a brilliant career, he studied the classics and philosophy at the Universities of Erlangen, Würzburg and Munich. Under the spell of Schelling's idealism, he came to the conclusion that Judaism was not a "law," but rather a "rule of conduct" which could and should be altered according to the spiritual needs of the times. The Rabbinate of Fürth fought back by pointing to the Deuteronomic Law which consigned heretics to death. Since the death sentence could no more be carried out physically, Einhorn was condemned to spiritual death unless he conformed. Einhorn refused to recant.

This was a century of change. Everywhere the minds of men were questioning traditions sacred for centuries. The very basis of Christianity was attacked and the venerable institution of monarchy put up for ridicule. On the other hand there was danger of yielding too much ground to the floodtide of rationalism. The Frankfurt Jewish Reform Verein had proclaimed that Mosaism was capable of unlimited development. The Mosaic Law, the Talmudic System, even the belief in the coming of the Messiah, were to be abrogated. Einhorn fought these tendencies as tenaciously as he had opposed rabbinical orthodoxy. Denying the divine revelation of the Scriptures was to him reducing them to a mere record of human wisdom.

In 1842, Einhorn was called to the Jewish community in Hoppstädten in the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. A few years later he was elected chief rabbi of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. He continued to take part in the great controversies which divided German Jewry into two hostile camps, and defended himself against accusations of disloyalty by pointing out that

certain parts of the ritual were nothing but the result of centuries of intolerance, that they should be eliminated as unbecoming an age of liberty.

It did not take the German government long to sense danger. The simple word "reform," from any quarter, had but one ominous meaning: change of the "God-given-order." If the Jews were dissatisfied with the beliefs of their forefathers, they had but to embrace Christianity and allow themselves to be absorbed by the German nation. The Junkers and the Conservative Party, undoubtedly under the influence of the Christian church, forced the government to withdraw its protection from the Jewish Reform Congregation. Thus Orthodox Jews welcomed German reactionaries as allies in the fight against liberalism in their ranks.

Einhorn decided thereupon to accept a call from the Reform Congregation of Pesth in Hungary. His predecessor had taken part in the revolutionary uprising and had had to flee for his life. He had been an extreme reformist and Einhorn tried to lead his community back to positive Judaism, liberal, yet loyal to the past. Even that was too much for the Orthodox of Pesth. They grew alarmed and voiced no objection when the government closed the temple. Einhorn remained for some years with friends and set down his principles of reform in a volume entitled *Das Prinzip des Mosaismus und dessen Verhältnis zum Heidenthum und Rabbinischen Judenthum*, (The principle of Mosaism and its relationship to Heathenism and Rabbinical Judaism).

This was the man who became rabbi of the Reform Congregation of Baltimore. He had been tested in the fight against orthodox ideas and yet had given proof of his courage by standing up against reformist extremes. He joined the thousands of German Liberals who out of despair or for reasons of personal safety abandoned Europe for America.

In this country Einhorn continued his feuds with orthodox and reformers alike. In his opinion some of the latter went too far, others again not far enough on the road to reform. The *Sinai*, a monthly paper which he founded after his arrival in Baltimore contained many a battle rich in words, ponderous in style, and showed his opinions regarding the numerous problems which beset the Jewish communities and congregations at that time. He attacked, for instance, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the outstanding leader of moderate reform in America who had published a prayerbook reflecting his views. Wise retorted by characterizing the *Sinai* as "a slanderous and false presentation of Jews and Judaism by an enemy of both." Einhorn in turn lashed back with long involved German sentences, and another feud would be carried on for months with no side yielding a single point.

In this, too, he followed closely the habits of the German political refugees, the Forty-eighters, who loved and cultivated their quarrels while their readers watched with fascination their verbose tournaments. Einhorn's reform theories, in fact his whole thinking, were deeply rooted in German culture. Reform Judaism flourished almost entirely in Jewish congregations whose members either hailed from Germany or were the direct descendants of German-Jewish immigrants.

"Take away from Reform Judaism the German spirit," Einhorn once wrote, "or what is the same thing, the German language, and you have torn away from it the mother soil and it must wither away, the lovely flower." On another occasion he stated: "Where the German sermon is banned, there the Reform Movement of Judaism is nothing more than a brilliant gloss, a decorated doll without heart, without soul, which the proudest temples and the most splendid theories cannot succeed in infusing with life." Again and again Einhorn urged his co-religionists to cultivate

the German language and to study German literature in order to get a deeper understanding of the human soul. Even Carl Schurz did not plead more eloquently to preserve the cultural heritage than this Jewish rabbi.

The German influence, and with it the reform movement, lost its impetus considerably in later years with the arrival of Jewish immigrants of Eastern Europe. Their extreme poverty and limited knowledge of Western culture made it difficult for them to join the wealthy congregations of their German co-religionists, moreover they had been schooled in strong orthodox traditions by the Polish Rabbinate.

David Einhorn, like Carl Schurz, was a born fighter, a man with a message and with deep convictions. At the same time he was endowed with the gift to convince people of the righteousness of his cause. One only needs to read Einhorn's sermons against slavery and compare them with Schurz' great speeches for the Union. In slaveholding Baltimore it took courage to call slavery "the greatest possible crime against God." Whenever he was reminded that the Mosaic Law sanctioned slavery and that the children of Israel practiced it in biblical times, he would invariably reply: "what does it matter, the spirit of the Law condemns it."

In 1861, when the famous riots broke out in Baltimore and the mob threatened to storm the office of the *Wecker*, a liberal German language newspaper, well known for its antislavery attitude, Einhorn had to flee for his life.

He was elected rabbi of Philadelphia and five years later, rabbi of the powerful Adath Jeshuram Congregation in New York. His monthly *Sinai* had died in 1863 in the battle against slavery. Even today its pages make interesting reading. Dr. Einhorn combined theological profundity with political wisdom, both practical and theoretical, which is more than can be said of many other political leaders. To the orthodox he remained the dangerous challenger of traditional ideas questioning the complacent acceptance of traditions. He tried not to repeat unthinkingly what the prophets had said in past ages, but to apply their message to the present.

His prayerbook, the *Olath Tamid* has been called a "God-sent interpreter of the consciousness of the modern Jew." Later it became the basis of the *Union Prayer Book*, published by the Central Conference of American rabbis. In 1869, Rabbi Einhorn founded the *Jewish Times* and continued to express his ideas. In some ways his views were extremely conservative. He opposed marriages between Gentiles and Jews, calling them "the nail in the coffin of the small Jewish race." He also rejected the theory of evolution as contrary to biblical revelation. David Einhorn died in 1879 in New York, but his memory lives inextricably with the history of his people.

As early as 1857 a third schism occurred in Baltimore. Some twenty members defected from Rabbi Rice's Congregation and from Einhorn's Har Sinai Synagogue and combined to found the Oheb Shalom Congregation. They believed in the conservative reforms of Cincinnati's Rabbi Isaak Mayer Wise. Rabbi Wise himself dedicated the new temple and recommended as rabbi of first rank, a Dr. Lewinsohn of Worms, Germany. Dr. Lewinsohn first accepted, then declined and proposed instead Dr. Benjamin Szold.

Born in 1829 in Nemiskert, Hungary, Szold began to read the Bible and the Talmud at an early age. He studied at the famous Pressburg Yeshibah and in 1848 took up residence in Vienna for further studies. Soon he had to leave because of his revolutionary activities. For several years he tutored children of wealthy Jewish families, attended the University of Breslau

and officiated as rabbi during the holidays in several towns in Silesia. The congregation of each of these places wanted to keep him as permanent rabbi. He was about to accept a call to Stockholm, when Dr. Lewinsohn persuaded him to go to Baltimore. He arrived in that city in 1858 and remained for thirty four years rabbi of the Oheb Shalom Congregation, eventually becoming its rabbi emeritus.

Dr. Szold's interpretation of Judaism steered a middle course between orthodoxy and reformism. Nevertheless, he was less liberal than Rabbi Einhorn. Under him the new congregation prospered and increased in numbers. He succeeded where Dr. Einhorn failed, namely to gain the confidence of the Polish and Russian immigrants who in the eighties flocked to his home for financial and spiritual support. He especially endeared himself to his fellowmen by defending their rights. He once even went personally to President Lincoln to plead for the life of a Jewish deserter during the Civil War.

Rabbi Szold, too, compiled a prayer book, the *Abodath Israel* which was adopted by several Jewish congregations throughout the country. Although not as prolific a writer as Einhorn, Szold wrote a number of religious books for use in Jewish homes and made scholarly contributions to Jewish literature and wrote a commentary on Job in the "purest rabbinical Hebrew," a treatise which is still read.

His thinking is best studied in the lecture on Moses Mendelssohn which he delivered to the German Society in Philadelphia in 1879 on the 150th birthday of the Jewish emancipator. Szold's numerous quotations from Goethe, Herder and Lessing show his profound knowledge of German literature. He stressed the deep cleavage which existed in the eighteenth century between the Jewish and the gentile world. It was in an atmosphere of mutual intolerance and suspicion that young Mendelssohn grew up. It was not alone his abject poverty which made his rise so remarkable. The boy had no teacher to guide him, no environment to stimulate his thoughts. Out of the darkness of the Middle Ages he had to grope his way, he had to create everything "aus seiner eigenen Brust": his encyclopaedic knowledge and his philosophy of tolerance and human kindness which charmed his own contemporaries and won him the admiration of Lessing. It was Lessing who helped him to gain his first public recognition by secretly bringing out his work *Briefe über die Empfindungen* (On the Sensations). It was Lessing who introduced this timid young Jew into the literary circles of Berlin and who erected to his friend an eternal monument in the person of the gentle Nathan. How deeply ingrained the prejudice was against men of Jewish faith can be seen from the fact that a monarch as tolerant as Frederick the Great refused to admit Moses Mendelssohn to the Prussian Academy of Science, in spite of the insistence of many great men in Prussia. He also expostulated with orthodox Jews who thought that any contact with Christian culture would sully their religion.

Rabbi Szold thus brought to life one aspect of the period of enlightenment which has often been neglected in cultural histories. He went so far as to compare Mendelssohn with philosophers like Socrates and Plato, thus demonstrating his wholehearted admiration for the man and faithfully guarding his spiritual inheritance in far-away America.

Reform Judaism, as we have seen, was born in Germany out of an attempt to meet a challenge to the spiritual existence of the Jewish people. The disappearance of the ghetto, the slow incorporation of Jews into German society threatened to destroy a three thousand year-old tradition. The Christian faith itself, at that time, represented by the two great creeds,

Protestantism and Catholicism, was reeling under the savage attack of rationalism which boldly limited the true and the real to what could be touched and seen. The balance between the spirit and the mind, rarest achievement in mankind's history, was in danger of being upset in favor of reason alone. No wonder that religious leaders became alarmed and sought to reconcile the claims of modern science with man's spiritual needs.

This reconciliation has certainly been the goal of Reform Judaism and for that reason men like David Einhorn and Benjamin Szold were attacked by both Orthodox and those Jewish assimilationists who thought that only by discarding everything that distinguishes Jews from Gentiles could the age-old prejudice and the persecutions be stopped and the final deliverance of the Jewish people be accomplished. Inevitably both were also attacked by the Christian State which regarded any reform-movement with suspicion engendered by fear and bad conscience.

Thus Einhorn and Szold followed the great stream of German Liberals who in the late forties and early fifties sought refuge in free America. Their beliefs ran the gamut from conservative Liberalism to open Communism of the hue of a Karl Marx. Some among them were fanatical freethinkers, rejecting God as a reactionary worse than Prince Metternich himself, some were God-fearing Protestant ministers whose crime in the eyes of the State consisted in believing that their faith was a living faith and therefore always in need of restatement in new historical situations.

It would be too bold to number Einhorn and Szold among those Forty-eighter revolutionaries whose motives for leaving the Fatherland had been mostly political, and whose activities had threatened the very foundations of the princely states. Nevertheless it is an undeniable fact that these two rabbis defeated despair and complacency and worked for that freedom in America which allowed their people to live and to think according to their convictions.

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