

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN
AND THE JEWS -
NEW YORK; 1909**

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ISAAC MARKENS

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BY ISAAC MARKENS

**AUTHOR OF
"THE HEBREWS IN AMERICA"**

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LINCOLN AND THE JEWS.

Since the name of Abraham Lincoln has been linked with no stirring event in connection with American Judaism it follows that the subject "Lincoln and the Jews," may possibly be lacking in the essentials demanding treatment at the hands of the critical historian. Nevertheless, as a student of the great war President the writer has been impressed by the vast amount of interesting material bearing upon his relations to the Jews, which it occurs to him is worthy of compilation and preservation. A contribution of this character seems specially fitting at the present time in view of the centenary of the one whose gaunt figure towers above all others in the galaxy of American heroes—"the first of our countrymen to reach the lonely heights of immortal fame."

The Jews of the United States formed but a small portion of the population in Lincoln's time. The President of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, their representative organization, estimated their number in the loyal States near the close of 1861 at not less than 200,000, which figures are now regarded as excessive. The Rev. Isaac Leeser as late as 1865 could not figure the entire Jewish population of the United States as exceeding 200,000, although he admitted that double that number had been estimated by others.

Political sentiment was then divided and found expression largely through the *Occident*, a monthly, published by Rev. Isaac Leeser in Philadelphia; the *Jewish Messenger*, a weekly, conducted by Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs in New York, and the *Israelite*, a weekly, edited by Rev. Isaac M. Wise in Cincinnati. Rabbis and laymen of learning and eloquence were

conspicuous in the political arena, both by voice and pen and to some of these we shall refer. Arrayed with the party represented by Lincoln was Rabbi David Einhorn, who published in Baltimore a German monthly called *Sinai*, devoted to the anti-slavery movement. Rabbi Isaacs unreservedly favored the preservation of the Union and the policy of Lincoln. In Philadelphia Rabbi Sabato Morais proved such a potential factor in rousing patriotic sentiment that he was elected an honorary member of the Union League Club of that city. Rabbi Liebman Adler of Chicago, besides patriotic appeals to his countrymen, sent his only son to serve in the ranks of an Illinois regiment. Dr. Abraham B. Arnold of Baltimore, arrayed himself with the Republican party on the election of Lincoln and was made a member of the State Executive Committee of Maryland. A former Assistant United States District Attorney of New York, Philip J. Joachimsen, who had secured the first conviction for slave trading, was a warm admirer of Lincoln and raised a regiment of troops which rendered good service.

The pro-slavery faction, by no means insignificant in numbers, had few leaders, their most earnest advocate being Rabbi Morris J. Raphall, of New York, author of *Post-Biblical History of the Jews*. In a pamphlet entitled *Bible View of Slavery*, published shortly after Lincoln's election, he sought to show that the "Divine Institution" had Scriptural sanction, a proposition by no means original, Rev. Leander Ker of Missouri having taken the same ground as early as 1853 in a book, *Slavery Sanctioned by the Bible*. Mr. Leeser, while sustaining Raphall, deplored his utterances as untimely, and Michael Heilprin in an article in the *New York Tribune* completely demonstrated the fallacy of Raphall's contention.

Writing from Philadelphia to the *Israelite* on January 13, 1861, Rabbi Wise said it was "not so much the election of Lincoln in itself that threatened the destruction of the Union as the speeches of Lincoln and his colleagues on the irre-

pressible conflict doctrine." This was coupled with a tribute to President Buchanan, the then occupant of the White House, who from Rabbi Wise's standpoint "has shown himself to be a full statesman and only now are the North appreciating his conservative administration." While deprecating the threatened dissolution of the Union Rabbi Wise indulged in frequent humorous flings at Lincoln after his election, comparing him to "a country squire who would look queer in the White House with his primitive manner." He also protested against his entertainment while passing through Cincinnati on his way to Washington. Later on his admiration for Lincoln was unbounded. In the course of an address following the President's death and published in the Cincinnati *Commercial* of April 20, 1865, he thus attempted to prove that he was one of the chosen people: "Abraham Lincoln believed himself to be bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He supposed himself to be of Hebrew parentage, *he said so in my presence*, and indeed he possessed the common features of the Hebrew race both in countenance and features." As a matter of fact Lincoln's knowledge of his ancestry was vague—so much so that his statement to Dr. Wise must be accepted as nothing more than a bit of pleasantry. Hon. Robert T. Lincoln states in reply to an inquiry of the writer, that he had "never before heard that his father supposed he had any Jewish ancestry."

Lincoln's policy was severely attacked in the California State Convention of the Breckinridge party held at Sacramento on June 11, 1861, by Solomon Heydenfeldt, a brilliant jurist of that State and a native of South Carolina. An example of his attitude appears in the published proceedings of that convention, wherein he refers in the course of the debates to "the Democrats of the Eastern States struggling against the tyranny of the administration, their voices being drowned by the music of Lincoln's drums."

President Lincoln's administration was marked by a few noteworthy incidents affecting the Jews as a body, the most important being the appointment of a Jewish chaplain in 1861-62, and the proposed expulsion of the Jews "as a class" from within the lines of General Grant's army in 1862-63. Here it may be proper to note that the President on two occasions was sharply reproved by the Jews for the objectionable phraseology of his State papers.

In his first inaugural orders he declared:

Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land are still competent to adjust in the best way our present difficulty.

In his "General Order Respecting the Observation of the Sabbath Day in the Army and Navy," issued November 15, 1862, he announced:

The importance for man and beast of the prescribed weekly rest, the sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors, a becoming deference to the best sentiments of a Christian people, and a due regard for the Divine will demand that Sunday labor in the Army and Navy be reduced to the measure of strict necessity.

This order provoked more or less public discussion and elicited a lengthy address to the President from one B. Behrend, of Narrowsburg, N. Y., the father of a Jewish soldier in the service, on the ground that "thousands in the army who celebrate another day as Sunday should be allowed to celebrate that day which they think is the right day according to their own consciences." The *Occident* shared in these views and urged that Jewish soldiers should be free from unnecessary work on their Sabbath. While the alleged sectarian character of these compositions subjected the President to considerable criticism, his utterances were soon lost sight of in the more stirring events of the day.

In the United States Senate May 22, 1860, Judah P. Benjamin spoke in scathing terms of Stephen A. Douglas and

lauded Lincoln, the question under consideration being certain measures introduced by Jefferson Davis on the subject of State Rights and Slavery. Benjamin's address on this occasion occupies several pages of the *Congressional Globe, 1859-60*, Part III. The Senator from Louisiana therein charged Douglas with inconsistency and evasion in his debates with Lincoln, referred to his Jonesboro address as "nonsense" and says Douglas copied from Lincoln's dispute with him. Lincoln had just been nominated for the Presidency. The nomination of Douglas was still in the balance. How far he had lost caste with the Southern leaders is evidenced by this exhortation by Benjamin:

I have been obliged to pluck down my idol from his place on high, and to refuse him any more support or confidence as a member of the Democratic party. His adversary stood upon principle and was beaten, and lo! he is a candidate of a mighty party for the Presidency of the United States. One stood on principle—was defeated. To-day where stands he? The other faltered—received the prize, but to-day where stands he? He is a fallen star; we have separated from him.

Referring further to the joint debates and more especially to Lincoln's declarations at Freeport in reply to interrogations of Douglas, regarding his position in the slavery question, he further complimented Lincoln in these words:

In that contest, the candidates for the Senate of the United States in the State of Illinois went before the people. They agreed to discuss the issue; they put questions to each other for answer, and I must say here, for I must be just to all, that I have been surprised in the examination that I have made again within the last few days of this discussion between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Douglas, to find that Mr. Lincoln is a far more conservative man, unless he has since changed his opinions, than I had supposed him to be. There was no dodging on his part. It is impossible not to admire the perfect candor and frankness with which his answers are given—no equivocation, no evasion.