

**VOICES FOR JUSTICE: JACOB M. ROTHSCHILD IN ATLANTA (1946-1973)
AND EDWARD B.M. BROWNE IN NEW YORK (1881-1889)**

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“One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South” evolved from an idea for a book that he wanted to write himself in the late 1960s. He thought of it as “A Voice from a Southern Pulpit,” focusing on excerpts from his civil rights sermons that would demonstrate how he succeeded in continually preaching racial justice within a deep South congregation. At that time publishers weren’t interested. Black power was in. They did not want to evoke memories of our having helped.

When Rabbi Rothschild died at the end of 1973, I decided to write the book myself. I thought, as he had, that it could be of value to other rabbis who would also have to choose between following their religious convictions and holding back so as not to risk the safety of their family and congregation. And it is no less daunting a decision for the lay leadership of a congregation to sustain a rabbi who chooses to activate those principles, so I hope that “One Voice” speaks to this point as well. Our Temple, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation of Atlanta, did that and deserves great credit for its courage.

My goal was to document Rabbi Rothschild’s story as closely as possible to the way that he had viewed it himself. I had his major sermons, lecture notes, correspondence and newspaper articles, as well as undocumented memories central to his role in the struggle for civil rights. I thought, too, that it might be of interest for me to share some of my own experiences, such as the impact of the Temple bombing, the night that Coretta and Martin Luther King, Jr., came to our house for dinner; of my husband’s chairmanship and my own role in Atlanta’s precedent breaking public dinner for King after he won the Nobel Peace Prize. I organized documents and outlined the book soon after the rabbi’s death, but then remarried and did not actually write it until eight years later, after the grieving was over and I had settled happily into a second marriage. This delay was beneficial, I believe, for it enabled me to approach the subject with a greater degree of objectivity than I could have mustered in early widowhood.

My approach to writing about my great-grandfather, Rabbi “Alphabet” Browne, was totally different. Edward B. M. Browne, LLD, AM, BM, DD, MD, whose colleagues called him “Alphabet” because of all the letters in his name, lived throughout my early childhood and I

actually have some slight but direct memory of him that bespeaks his sharp and biting sense of humor. Family tradition, far from endowing him with a halo, cast suspicion on almost everything he was purported to have done. One notable exception was the story of his having been a pall bearer in the state funeral of President Ulysses S. Grant. I had seen the black armband that identified him as such--a souvenir which has since disappeared--and my grandmother, his customarily critical daughter, had regaled me with fond memories of having viewed the procession as a romantic nine-year-old from an area at the Fifth Avenue Hotel reserved for celebrities and families of the participants.

It was not this, however, but another adventure in the rabbi's New York experience that first caught my attention as a potential for publication. I discovered it in the partial galley of a book intended to be published as a tribute to him, and initially thought of it as material for a play or a mystery novel. Adolph Reich, a seventy-year-old Hungarian Jewish immigrant, had been falsely accused of murdering his wife, railroaded to conviction and sentenced to death. Browne, whose law degree enabled him to intercede *pro bono*, appealed to New York Governor David Hill and succeeded in getting a last-minute stay of execution. Hill commuted the sentence to life imprisonment, and Browne hammered at successive governors for fifteen years before finally convincing Governor Benjamin Odell to grant Reich a full pardon and release in 1904. Then Browne, especially resentful that his friend Teddy Roosevelt, as Governor, had refused to pardon Reich, reportedly wrote a play about the case for the Yiddish Theater in which Roosevelt--then President--was portrayed as one of the minor villains and Browne himself performed as himself.¹

Long before I discovered this last bit of information I realized that Browne, his times and career, deserved to be taken seriously and presented in the context of American Jewish history. The book galley contained his own detailed account of his experiences in New York and elsewhere as well as encomia to him not only by the Jewish "working men's" committee that presented it but also by prominent Christian friends, including former Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. In addition, I had a small collection of letters from his later years, newspaper clippings, various ornaments such as portraits, jewelry and silver inscribed with names and dates, Browne's meerschaum pipes, and an album of poetry that he had written and presented to Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and Theresa Bloch Wise on the occasion of their 25th Wedding Anniversary.

I began my research at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati because I knew that Dr. Marcus had begun a collection of Browne's documents there, and I continued seeking information wherever I suspected that I might find it. First, of course, were the relevant city newspapers and the Library of Congress. Further clues led to "jackpot hits" at the New York Public Library and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. A

chance acquaintance with TR's great-grandson, Tweed Roosevelt, led me to the presidential papers on microfilm which yielded more "jackpot" discoveries, enclosures in Browne's correspondence with Presidents Benjamin Harrison, William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson.²

Perhaps my greatest surprise occurred when I noticed a newspaper clipping in the scrapbook that the family had preserved, reporting a lecture that Browne gave in memory of Theodor Herzl in 1912. This was an astounding revelation, considering that until Rabbi Rothschild joined my family, no one in it had ever mentioned Zionism other than disparagingly. My emailed inquiry to Central Zionist Archives yielded two file folders-full of correspondence with Herzl (1897-1898) in which Browne told the father of Zionism some unvarnished facts of American Jewish life, its leaders, and their negative attitude toward Zionism. The letters also revealed his own devotion to Zionism and readiness to leave his position as rabbi in order to work for it. That was truly exciting news to one whose parents had once belonged to the American Council for Judaism!³

An additional pleasure in researching my ancestor was that of deriving information--especially to authenticate dates--by means of objects that had been handed down in the family. I verified a variably recorded wedding date, for example, by reading the inscription on my silver coffee urn, a wedding present to my great-grandparents. My Shabbat candlesticks told me what I needed to know about their tenure in Youngstown, Ohio, for they are inscribed with the date to my great-grandmother from the Ladies Bible Class of the congregation, in appreciation for her teaching it. The 267 page album of handwritten poetry that Browne had given to the Wises told me much about Browne's student days at the Wise home in Cincinnati, his vast knowledge of secular subjects and his sense of humor (the album was later returned to our family.) I also had a small collection of letters from his later years, post cards sent to the family from Europe and the Middle East.

These provided the initial clues for my scavenger hunt. Today, after seven years, I am still searching, finding intriguing new clues below each layer of information, reluctant to call it quits. This paper will concentrate on the most interesting and historically significant era of Browne's life, his rabbinate in New York City, 1881-1889.

RABBI "ALPHABET" BROWNE IN NEW YORK

Browne came to America from his home town of Eperies in Austro-Hungary (now Presov, Slovakia) in 1865, at the age of twenty, bringing with him a rabbinic degree from the head of a well-known Hungarian seminary, and a background of secular education at a

government school. His photographic memory had tempted his father, a judge in the community, to exploit the son's brilliance by having him recite randomly chosen passages from the Talmud for community benefits. In America, Browne quickly came under the tutelage of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the leader of Reform Judaism, and was taken into the Wise home in Cincinnati to live as a member of the family. Wise sent him to Savannah for a year to improve his English while teaching at the Savannah Hebrew Collegiate Institute, then brought him back to Cincinnati to complete his studies, which included earning a medical degree from the University of Cincinnati as well as his training for the Reform rabbinate.⁴

Wise sent his protege first to Montgomery where he remained only a few months, then to Milwaukee where he met with similar lack of success. After that, Browne returned to studies, moving to Madison where he earned a law degree from the University of Wisconsin, and began lecturing to the general public. In 1871, on the way to Charleston, South Carolina, to try out for the position of English preacher at Congregation Beth Elohim, he stopped off in Evansville, Indiana, met Sophie Weil, the talented and beautiful 16-year-old daughter of a prominent family, and decided to stay. They were married the following year. Meanwhile, he found employment as professor of Medical Jurisprudence and Diseases of the Mind at the Evansville Medical College, as well as rabbi of Evansville's Congregation B'nai Israel, and editor of *The Jewish Independent* out of Chicago. A year later he was called to Congregation Anshe Emeth in Peoria, enjoyed success there, but soon developed a problem with his eyes which would plague him throughout the remainder of his life. Threatened with total loss of sight if he continued as a congregational rabbi, he resigned his position, signed onto the lecture circuit to support his family, and reapplied himself to writing for the newspaper. It was through this effort, in his capacity as a journalist, that he became personally acquainted with President Ulysses S. Grant, an encounter which grew into a family friendship that endured through two succeeding generations of the Grant family.⁵

In 1877, Browne's ophthalmologist approved his return to the rabbinate, and he accepted a call to the Temple in Atlanta. There he launched his own newspaper, *The Jewish South*, which was the first newspaper to address the Jews of the South, and immediately incurred the wrath of his mentor, Wise, presumably because it competed with Wise's own *American Israelite*. An injudicious and tactless decision by Browne to publish a report on the elopement of Wise's daughter--news already carried in papers elsewhere--exacerbated the situation, turning Wise's anger into enmity and signaling an unhappy turning point in Browne's career. Although the use of press and pulpit as lethal weapons was common practice in those days, Wise's unrelenting attacks on Browne proved especially damaging as this discouraged other Reform rabbis from openly befriending him.⁶

After four years, Browne had to leave Atlanta because of a slanderous rumor, one immediately proven to be false, but devastating nonetheless. The libel spread, spoiling his chances for employment of any sort for almost a year. He finally obtained a pulpit in New York, Temple Gates of Hope. Situated in upper Manhattan, the congregation consisted of seventy upwardly mobile German-speaking immigrants who had been in the country long enough to move uptown but could not yet afford to own their synagogue. Within a year, Browne's oratory attracted enough new members to enable them to buy and renovate a church on 86th Street between Park and Lexington which, a month after dedication, was already too small to accommodate all who came to hear him.⁷

Such success stemmed not only from Browne's eloquence, but also from his ability to preach both in German, which he did on Saturday mornings for the older members, and in English on Friday evenings for their American-educated progeny. He also attracted Christians to his evening services, lectures being a popular form of entertainment that could be enjoyed free of charge by attending synagogue.⁸

New York, when Browne moved there in 1881, was home to one third of the nation's Jews and would receive some 14,000 more with the stream of other immigrants within the next two years. Overcrowding at Castle Garden, predecessor of Ellis Island, virtually invited the widespread exploitation that developed, even to the point of hijacking women for white slavery. Neither the government nor relief agencies could control such an unprecedented situation, and Jewish philanthropists were equally inadequate in providing the necessary oversight in caring for their own.⁹

Mass immigration and labor disputes had begun to effect the changes that would soon transform the Gilded Age into the Progressive Age, signals that already worried beneficiaries of the status quo. Successful German Jews, notably members of New York's elite Temple Emanuel, America's wealthiest, assumed responsibility for their impoverished brethren and retained a nervous look-out for antisemitism. The congregation viewed itself as arbiter of public relations and dispenser of welfare for all of New York Jewry, empowering its distinguished rabbi, Gustav Gottheil, as its spokesperson to the Gentile world.¹⁰

For immigrant relief, the long established Board of Delegates of American Israelites had combined its efforts with those of the Hebrew Sheltering Society and the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (HEAS, 1882-1884) a small but initially effective makeshift organization composed of twenty-four Polish congregations. HEAS did not have sufficient funds to care for the newcomers and while publicly urging American Jews to give liberally, "not to carry out any

grand plan of colonization...but to save [the refugees] from actual starvation and ourselves from reproach,” actually begged its European counterpart, the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, to stop sending them. On the other hand, Morris Ellinger, one of its officers who also headed the firm “Ellinger, Karsheadt, Birnbaum & Co., Importers and Jobbers in Russian Jews,” traveled abroad to recruit emigres, yet declared “America is not a poorhouse (or) an asylum for the paupers of Europe. [European Jewry] may ask us what they are to do with the sick, aged and infirm. (My) reply would be ‘That is your business; we take care of our own sick, aged and infirm, and ask assistance of no one.’”¹¹

Browne soon perceived that a number of those charged with dispensing the *tzedakah* were egregiously mishandling it. Upon learning that girls were being sold “for immoral purposes,” he and Sophie went each morning to Castle Garden to greet the newcomers. She frequently returned home bringing a young woman who had traveled alone, to be sheltered and employed in the Browne household until a more permanent situation could be found. Browne investigated, and upon learning that much of the money donated was being “so shamefully managed that humanity appealed...for interference,” turned to the philanthropists, whose “great names were the only guarantee to European Committees... for the judicious distribution of the contributed money and the fraternal treatment of the strangers.” He assumed that, since the European Jewish press had been blaming them for the trouble, they would appreciate having their names cleared and the blame placed where it belonged.¹²

He was wrong. Among those whom he identified there were friends, employees, and perhaps even relatives of the “great men,” important individuals who were understandably unhappy to receive the information and even more reluctant to have it released. They told the rabbi to mind his own business and prevented the local papers from publishing the story. Browne retaliated by immediately establishing his own newspaper, the *New York Jewish Herald*, and getting the news to Europe by week’s end. As a result, he recalled, “The moneys from the European Committees were stopped, the Emigrant Aid Association died and was buried without a friend to ‘omit flowers.’”¹³

Browne subsequently reported the disappearance of some \$60,000 raised for the refugees, and named those whom his investigation identified as having stolen it. At the Schiff Shelter on Ward’s Island where the Jewish immigrants were housed temporarily, he found evidence of extortion, robbery and prostitution. After discovering the case of a young girl allegedly sent to a brothel in Pittsburgh, he went to Washington, met with President Chester A. Arthur and Secretary of the Treasury Charles J. Folger, and convinced them to provide government transportation back to Europe for those who wanted to go. He himself was appointed to

accompany the returnees as government escort.¹⁴

Two days later, a riot broke out on Ward's Island and turned public opinion against the refugees, thus causing the transport to be canceled. The incident became known as "the *tzimmes* riot" due to the fact that it began when one of the immigrants, at dinner on *Shabbat*, was refused "an extra allowance of some stewed prunes and apples." The unhappy diner seized the ladle from the orderly and hit him on the head with it, whereupon a melee ensued. The superintendent, a HEAS employee who was said to have antagonized his charges on other occasions, called the police and then joined them to confront the refugees wielding a club.¹⁵

The *New York Tribune* reported the story with sympathy for the 700 "poor Hebrews who have been kept in idleness...[housed] in rude sheds at the best...[and fed] with rigid economy" from what appeared to have been a bucket. It revealed that the HEAS superintendent and his assistant had previously been accused of dealing with the men and women under their care "in the most offensive ways," brandishing clubs and pistols when there was no reason to do so. It did credit HEAS with trying to find jobs for them, though with little success, and also noted that the HEAS representatives had named Browne as one of the "meddlers" from the city responsible for the discontent.¹⁶

While becoming *persona non grata* to the Reform Jewish leadership, however, Browne attracted friends and admirers in other quarters, especially among the Orthodox Jewish masses downtown. The *New York Daily Graphic* reported that "the six leading Jewish Rabbis and their congregations combined against him...[and] oppose everything, if ever so proper, if it originates with Browne..." and then noted that he "mingles largely with the best families of Christians; he speaks extemporaneously and is very polite and accessible to reporters, unlike some of his prudish brethren."¹⁷

One indication of this esteem was an invitation to deliver the opening prayer in the United States Senate on Tuesday, May 27, 1884. It was only the second time in the nation's history that a rabbi had received this honor, the other having been accorded Browne's former mentor, I. M. Wise, during the Civil War.¹⁸

In 1885, Browne was designated to represent American Jews as an honorary pall bearer in President Grant's funeral. Of the fourteen honorary pall bearers, all but one rode in carriages of state. Browne insisted upon walking because the funeral took place on *Shabbat*, a stance which according to *The Daily Graphic*, "provoked considerably the Reform Jews, who regarded it as contrary to their progressive views." Still considering himself a Reform Jew, Browne would not normally have refrained from riding on the Sabbath, but refused to do it on that occasion because he recognized that he represented all American Jews, not only those who

interpreted the Torah as he did. Consequently, when at first his request to walk was refused, he declined the unprecedented invitation to participate, sending a telegram to Fred Grant, the President's son, in which he said, "since I cannot honor your sainted father and my religion both, I would have to forego the honor..." The Grant family then directed the general in charge of arrangements to reverse his decision and allow the rabbi to walk.¹⁹

Behind Browne's insistence on publicly respecting traditional Jewish observance lay his determination to use his participation in the funeral as a protest demonstration against the growing movement within Reform congregations to hold Sabbath services on Sunday. This was one of the means by which they hoped to stem the sharp decline in synagogue attendance and help combat the appeal of Christian missionaries to a growing number of disaffected Jewish youth. Browne opposed that point of view, as did his former mentor Wise, and therefore sought to publicize the fact that the vast majority of American Jews observed Saturday as their Sabbath. Christians as well as Orthodox Jews applauded him for it, for they, too, were suffering a sharp decline in religious observance. Some Christian ministers even took turns walking alongside the rabbi for portions of his long trek from the Battery to Riverside Park. As *The Daily Graphic* described it, "While we are writing this, Rabbi Browne is 'footing it' to Riverside in honor of the Jewish Sabbath, and every time he sets foot upon the pavement he tramples upon the hearts of his opponents who tried to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday."²⁰

Representatives of ten Orthodox congregations, led by their chief rabbi, Abraham J. Ash, thanked Browne at a reception hosted by Gates of Hope, giving him an illuminated manuscript and a gold medal bearing the inscription, "Boruch mkadesh Hashabos (blessed be he who sanctified the Sabbath)" beneath a relief that depicted him wearing the pall bearer's badge. The story found its way into newspapers nationwide, continuing for decades afterward on the occasions of ceremonies commemorating Grant's death and whenever publicizing a lecture by Browne.²¹

Strict enforcement of Sunday closing laws, which was one of the ways in which Protestants addressed their own decline in church attendance, caused great hardship for Jews, especially new immigrants struggling to make a living by working "24/7." Soon after Grant's death, the prestigious Nineteenth Century Club organized clergymen for a public discussion of Sabbath observance, and invited Browne to present the Jewish point of view. This did not sit well with some of the club's Jewish members, however. According to *The New York Mail and Express*, "It has given offence to some of the Fifth Avenue Israelites to see Rabbi Browne, an outsider, selected for the Jewish side over Rabbi Gottheil, one of the Vice-Presidents of the club and a Fifth Avenue preacher."²² Pressure from Temple Emanu-El subsequently caused Browne's

invitation to be rescinded and transferred to Gottheil.²³

These were by no means the only controversial issues that Browne joined during his years in New York. As he grew older, he moved ever closer to the concept of the Twentieth Century Reform rabbis trained in the ideals of Prophetic Judaism. Being familiar with American law as well as with Jewish law, he could act publicly and effectively upon these precepts, which he did not hesitate to do. He viewed the most crucial need to be that of civil rights for the poor--Christians as well as Jews, and not only for immigrants but also for many Southerners living in areas still impoverished by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Public education, he asserted, was the basic remedy.

Attracted to the Republican party because of its stand on education, Browne befriended James G. Blaine, the once-and-future “White Knight” Secretary of State. Speaking out extemporaneously at a Republican rally for Blaine as President in October, 1884, Browne said that he endorsed the candidate “because Jews value education, and the Republican Party is the party of education.” He captured both the crowd and the candidate with the quip “the Bureau of Education is not the Bureau of *Internal* Revenue, but of *eternal* revenue.”²⁴

A month later the Union League Club asked Browne to head a three-man committee charged with lobbying Congress on behalf of a bill that would temporarily provide funds for public schools in impoverished states, and before presenting his paper in Washington, he submitted it to Blaine for advice. Blaine replied with profuse admiration, reiterating his appreciation for Browne’s help in the recent ill-fated campaign, and telling him that his remarks at the rally had been “a masterpiece of strategic oratory” that should have been the only one delivered there. Had it been circulated as zealously as the opposition’s accusatory catch-phrase “Rum, Romanism and Rebellion,” said Blaine, the Republicans would have won and he would have brought Browne in as his choice “amongst those nearest to me in the affairs of our nation.”²⁵

While such details probably went unnoticed by New York’s Jewish leaders, some did note with disapproval Browne’s involvement in specifically Jewish issues. He was credited with authorship of the “Saturday Half-Holiday” bill, which benefitted workers but would not have been perceived as a boon by their employers. *The New York Mail and Express* noted approvingly that the rabbi had labored for “the early **closing of the retail clerks and the Sunday closing of the hatters...although those measures secured him the animosity of the many manufacturers and dealers amongst his own people.**”²⁶

Another issue was legislation requiring that Jewish children be excused from public school on Yom Kippur. Inconceivable as it is that Jewish leaders, and even a rabbi, would oppose such a ruling, this did occur in New York City when Browne raised the issue. Although Jewish children comprised approximately thirty to forty percent of the city's school enrolment, they were habitually refused permission to be absent on the High Holidays, and even penalized for missing tests that teachers often scheduled for those days. When Browne sought to redress the situation, including also a request for Catholic children to be excused on Good Friday, the Superintendent of Public Schools did not even acknowledge his communication. Browne, aware that they were then in an election year, reacted by threatening to "carry the question into politics and enlist 25,000 Hebrew votes" for the mayoral candidate who would support it. Temple Emanu-El's Rabbi Gottheil responded by expressing full satisfaction with "things as they are," and added his regret "that any one man should make himself in such a manner the spokesman of the Hebrew citizens of New York. We do not desire that this should be made a public question. The Hebrews do not combine for political purposes."²⁷

Browne, meanwhile, obtained letters from the chief rabbis of Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Morocco and Jerusalem, as well as from Wise of Cincinnati, all of whom sustained his position. He also wrote to school superintendents in all of the large cities across America, who agreed as well, even noting that Jewish children in their jurisdictions were fully excused already. With these testimonials in hand, Browne went to Albany, appealed to the State Legislature and the Board of Education, and won.²⁸

When this finally took place in October, 1886, the *New York Herald* reported that the "closing feast of the Hebrew autumn holidays... was a veritable red letter day in the history of American Judaism... In order to bring about that grand achievement Rabbi Browne, of the Temple Gates of Hope, has been fighting ungrudgingly for three years against the opposition by the radical rabbis of this city who maintained that it was not against the Mosaic law to send children to school on the Day of Atonement, one of them going so far as to announce that he would send his own children to school on that day."²⁹

The children themselves thanked Browne with "a handsome gold medal," inscribed "Our rights to observe our holidays without loss of marks."³⁰

Another point of contention between Browne and his Reform colleagues was legislation known as "Hebrew Marriage bill" which sought to prevent "the systematic trade in marriage... carried on by some rabbis of the Hebrew Church... by confining the right to perform the marriage

ceremony to the rabbis of incorporated congregations.” Browne believed that no such abuse existed, and that the underlying purpose of the proposed law was to force an increase in congregational membership. An anonymous letter in *The Jewish Messenger* endorsed that opinion, pointing to “the Jewish Ministers’ Association” as being responsible for the move, and observed that “our brethren downtown appear to be highly agitated about a bugbear which is very harmless and in the end will produce results which were not to be foreseen by our liberal rabbis.”³¹

Again Browne conducted his own investigation, and again produced a lengthy document for use in arguing his case, this time before the New York Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill passed anyway, but in amended form allowing “priests of every denomination” to officiate at weddings.³²

A dedicated supporter of labor, Browne became more deeply involved in political issues in agreement with the philosophy of Henry George and his Single Tax Theory, a concept heatedly opposed by keepers of the status quo .He inspired *The New York Jewish Daily News* to dub him “Rabbi Browne, the poor man’s friend” in its report of a United States Labor Party rally in Union Square, at which the rabbi told a crowd of 100,000 people, “The power of Labor, guided by law, is the power of God....The ‘overalls’ are the grandest uniform upon the face of the earth.”³³

In 1886 Browne wrote to the Republican Party Chairman, Elihu Root regarding the upcoming mayoral election in New York City, saying that he knew of a good Republican who could be elected over the Tammany incumbent. Without mentioning the man’s name, he invited Root to his home to discuss the matter. Whether Root complied or not is unknown, but the election itself is significant because of its effect upon Jewish participation in New York politics. Democrat Abraham Hewitt won as expected and Republican Assemblyman Theodore Roosevelt finished second, but Henry George of the United Labor Party came in third with between 5,000 and 15,000 Jewish votes, many of which had previously gone to Tammany Democrats. Political analysts concluded that this was due to Jewish immigrants having cast their votes for the first time, motivated by their support for Henry George. This heralded the subsequent widespread Jewish participation in New York City politics and consequently the importance of the Jewish vote, a point which Browne used to good effect in order to benefit Republican candidates in future elections ³⁴

Browne’s true activism in Republican politics began when Matthew S. Quay, chairman of the 1888 Republican Presidential Campaign, asked him to bring in the Jewish vote for

Benjamin Harrison in New York, Indiana and Ohio. In New York, Browne had widespread influence among the “downtown” Jews. In Indiana, Harrison’s his home state, which he was about to lose by association with another Republican, gubernatorial candidate Alvin P. Hovey, Browne also had influence and the assistance of his prominent father-in-law Moses Weil. Hovey had once written an antisemitic letter that was being used to discredit him and other Republicans. Quay thought that Browne, because of his friendship with Grant and defense of Grant’s antisemitic General Order #11 during the Civil War, could neutralize the damage done by the resurfacing of Hovey’s letter in Indiana. He hoped as well that Browne could salvage the Jewish vote in Ohio, which was already considered lost due to the influence of Wise and his newspapers.³⁵

After Republican friends such as former Secretary of State Hamilton Fish urged Browne to accept, he agreed to do without the proffered remuneration, but on condition that “in case of success there would be a Jew in Harrison’s Cabinet” whom he would be asked to select. He said that he made the condition because he believed that such an honor would help ameliorate antisemitism in Europe.³⁶

Browne knew, of course, that no candidate could make such a promise openly. Harrison cagily replied that, if elected, he would “not only be willing but shall regard it as a duty to listen to the suggestions of my Republican friends and give them such weight as they seem to be entitled to.” Construing Harrison’s response to have been an implied consent, Browne embarked on the campaign and immediately wrote to Wise relaying the information as he viewed it, telling Wise that he would be the choice for Secretary of the Interior in return for endorsing Harrison. Browne composed a similar letter for Quay to send, in which the campaign chairman offered Wise any price for his support in *The American Israelite*.³⁷

Wise, long known as a Democrat, responded through his son Leo “that under no consideration” could he support the Republican nominee.³⁸

Browne, still determined to “undo Wise’s work” in Ohio, then turned to another influential Jewish Ohioan, State Senator Henry Mack. Finding the aged legislator at a spa in Germany undergoing medical treatment, Browne offered him the same incentive of a Cabinet post that he had offered Wise, and Mack accepted. Against his doctor’s advice, Mack immediately embarked for America. Browne, meanwhile, booked New York’s Grand Opera House for the day after Mack was scheduled to arrive, wrote a speech for him on the tariff question, and arranged for a government tug to meet his ship in the harbor and bring him to town undetected. All went well until the morning of the speech when Mack awakened too ill to appear. Undaunted as ever, Browne had himself made up to look like Mack and delivered the

speech himself.³⁹

Harrison lost Ohio despite Browne's efforts, but he won Indiana and New York. There the rabbi's recruits may have been a significant factor, for he had organized the Hebrew American Republican League, a group of twenty-three men's clubs that claimed credit for bringing in more than half of their precinct's 16,000 Republican votes in that election, votes that otherwise would presumably have gone to the Democrats.

Ten days after Harrison's victory, with appointments being announced and as yet no mention of a Jew, Browne took the President-elect to task for having disregarded his implied promise. "Being convinced," he wrote Harrison, "that the Jews of Indiana and New York have assured you those two states, it is plain that... the success of our party should give the Hebrews of the United States the recognition the Germans had in [Carl] Schurz..."⁴⁰

As time went on Browne was embarrassed by Harrison's failure to give even petty patronage to the Jewish volunteers who had helped elect him, and he continued to plead on their behalf as well as for himself. His pleas were never acknowledged. Four years later, torn between his sense of justice and his dedication to the Republican Party, Browne fought against Harrison's candidacy for reelection and exulted in Harrison's defeat.⁴¹

At the same time that Browne was campaigning for Harrison, he was engaged in the case of Adolph Reich, the Jewish immigrant falsely accused and convicted for having killed his wife. Because the press had condemned Reich from the beginning, referring to him as "the wife-killer" even before the trial began, many Jews were deeply embarrassed by the publicity and condemned Browne for defending him. The strongest point against Reich was a last-minute change of plea from not guilty to one of guilty by reason of self defense, a unilateral decision taken by his court appointed attorney in direct contradiction to Reich's wishes and the advice of his friends. Thus forced to deny his innocence after having sworn to it under oath, the accused was branded as a perjurer and Browne, having sworn to his belief in the man's innocence, was likewise called a perjurer by those seeking to defame him.

While preoccupied with defending Reich and campaigning for Harrison, Browne apparently ignored a campaign that was brewing within his own congregation. Ostensibly a controversy over membership and voting rights, it easily developed into an attempt to oust the rabbi, and the accusation of perjury, legally untenable though it was, gave Browne's opponents the ammunition they needed in order to dismiss him. This occurred in the spring of 1887.⁴²

Browne's supporters immediately seceded from Gates of Hope and founded Mount Sinai Temple. One friend, a successful woolen rag dealer, offered to buy a church building at the

corner of 45th Street and Madison Avenue for their new synagogue, but the neighborhood proved unsuitable. The group then decided upon five lots available at 160 East 112th Street in Harlem, and Browne's father-in-law, Moses Weil, of Evansville, loaned them \$1000 to build there.⁴³

No sooner had the new congregation acquired plans for construction than someone bought a large church a few blocks away and began renovating it for a synagogue. Browne's friends thought it unwise to settle in the same neighborhood, and found some unfinished buildings on 88th Street. Directing their architect to design plans for remodeling them, they rented a Baptist church on 112th Street to use in the meantime. Inexplicably, city authorities delayed approving the plans, and then claimed to have lost them. That required Browne's trustees to extend their lease of the Baptist church, but when they attempted to do so they were told that the church had just been sold and they must vacate it immediately.⁴⁴

At that point Adolph Sanger, a prominent Jewish attorney who had befriended Browne while working with him on the Reich Case, advised him that these misfortunes were not accidental and that they would continue for as long as the rabbi remained in New York City. Sanger later observed that, "with all his pluck...[the rabbi is] only one man without money or backing, whereas his enemies are legion and omnipotent." Realizing that Sanger was right, Browne reluctantly prepared to leave--but not before finding a church at 149 East 72nd Street that was suitable for renovation as a synagogue and acceptable as a temporary home for his congregation.⁴⁵

On January 18, 1889, at the close of Browne's final Friday evening service, a delegation from the Hebrew American Republican League, the group that he had organized for the recent Presidential Campaign, came to honor him for having saved the life of Adolph Reich. The chairman of the Presentation Committee opened the ceremony by reading from an embossed scroll of resolutions, one of which announced the committee's intention to publish a book commemorating Browne's rabbinate in New York, for which purpose they brought a professional stenographer to record the evening's proceedings.

Alexander S. Rosenthal, president of the League, then spoke, explaining that they had come to honor Browne for doing "what no other Hebrew has ever done in this country before..." i.e., that he "saved the honor of Judaism... and our proud tradition that no Hebrew has ever been executed in the state of New York." He recalled having seen the rabbi, day after day, on the lower East Side, ministering to the immigrants "in the humble Courts...where the poor and needy seek redress or protection." He noted that Browne's enemies had used the Reich Case to stir up trouble, trying to justify the canard that the rabbi was a perjurer by spreading rumors that he was Reich's nephew and had kept for himself a fortune collected for Reich's defense (actually,

Browne had only money received fifty dollars from Jacob Schiff and had returned it forthwith.) Rosenthal then revealed that Reich's son had been accosted and threatened by the president of Browne's former congregation along with a former coroner, Moritz Ellinger, who tried to make him sign a petition for the rabbi's arrest on charges of having misappropriated the defense fund.

It may not have been accidental that this was the same Ellinger whom Browne had named in the mistreatment of immigrants six years before.⁴⁶

When Rosenthal concluded, Reich's son David rose to present Browne with a gold-headed cane on behalf of the family as well as a profound apology for having unwittingly participated in the campaign against him.

Browne responded, expressing anguish as well as appreciation for the tribute. "I lost my temple, acquired by six years of hard work," he said, "I lost my name, gained after twenty three years of an intrepid public life, my wife almost crazed by the false reports in the press, anonymous letters, etc., my children often almost ashamed to acknowledge me as their father. Today I am repaid by you for those two years of agony."⁴⁷

Rosenthal rose again to say that he had met Browne only three months earlier and prior to that had been prejudiced against him by people who themselves had never met him and could cite nothing against him other than his defense of Reich. People who had heard Browne speak at B'nai Brith meetings and elsewhere, Rosenthal said, praised his oratory but denounced him nonetheless, having based their views on the word of important members of the Jewish elite whose opinions they did not question. Since the "great men" of the city had succeeded in driving Browne away. "The rich Jewish people and their rabbis will be happy," he declared, but the down town poor would miss the rabbi, for not only had he defended them in court, but he also "treated them as a physician and brought them medicines." Rosenthal even credited Browne with having cured people of epilepsy and with having discovered a new remedy for the disease, as well as having never taken payment either for his services or for the medications that he brought.⁴⁸

The Chairman also disclosed that he had published affidavits from Reich and others in order to show that attempts had been made to prevent witnesses from testifying at the commutation hearing, and to make them swear "to the contrary of what is the truth, in order to defeat Dr. Browne, even at the sacrifice of a human life." He then presented Browne with a "life-saving" gold medal, inscribed "Chol Yisrael arevim zeh l'zeh" (All Jews are responsible for each other) in Hebrew characters, followed in English by "To Rev. Dr. Browne for saving the life of Adolph Reich," and attempted to give Browne a check as partial reimbursement for his expenses on Reich's behalf. Browne gratefully accepted the medal but declined the money.⁴⁹

A succession of others then spoke in praise of Browne. One was Reverend J. G. B. Heath, minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church and Chaplain of the Tombs prison where Reich had been held. He said that he, too, had been firmly convinced of the man's innocence, gave his own reasons for believing it, and praised Browne for pursuing the defense against all odds. He reminded the congregation that its rabbi was neither a lawyer working for a large fee, nor a politician, "laying his shrewd plans for office, money and fame," but "a quiet, modest preacher...a diligent, ambitious student of science, literature, history, theology and reform."⁵⁰

Publication of the commemorative book was postponed at Browne's request in order to avoid possible interference with his efforts to free Adolph Reich. While it was never fully published and distributed, most of the galley survived to provide details of Browne's experience both from his own pen and from others. It included testimonials from prominent New Yorkers who admired the rabbi but feared to show it publicly. The attorney Adolph Sanger, who later became Mayor *pro tem* of New York, President of its Board of Education, and Grand President of B'nai B'rith, in declining to speak at the ceremony candidly admitted, "I more than anybody else should raise my voice on that occasion, but circumstances favor my silence. Dr. Browne is not the man to be liked by people who believe in policy...we may say of him: 'Every man has his fault, and honesty is his.'... My laudation of Dr. Browne publicly would do him no good and might do me harm..."⁵¹

Hamilton Fish was another friend who expressed his admiration privately but declined to speak. Yet another was Colonel Elliot F. Sheppard, a newspaper publisher and noted advocate of Negro rights who was the son-in-law of William H Vanderbilt. "I knew the rabbi for several years and we meet often," he wrote. "I always found in him a model gentleman socially, a true friend of the people publicly and, what endears him to most perhaps, a sincere defender of the Sabbath and of religion. His refusal to ride during President Grant's funeral has done more for the Sabbath and for religion than thousands of sermons."

His letter of regrets also included some insightful observations of New York Jewry. "The orthodox Jews of this city showed their appreciation by publicly honoring him," Sheppard wrote, "and the reformed [sic] Jews showed their temper by denouncing him for that noble act. The Spanish Portuguese Hebrews, the highest type of American Jews, speak of Rabbi Browne very kindly. The foreign [i.e. German] Jews, who grew rich in this country persecute him, and his most ardent enemies are amongst the reformed Jews."⁵²

The Rev. Dr. Howard Crosby, head of the Christian Union and pastor of the 4th Avenue Presbyterian Church, also declined to speak at the testimonial but wrote that he was honored when he heard Browne referred to as "The Jewish Crosby...[for] Dr. Browne does more good

than I. I am at the head of a powerful organization, and pastor of a great church to aid and support me, but the Rabbi has only his own energy and enthusiasm to rely upon.” Crosby commented as well upon the source of all the animosity toward Browne, noting that he was “sufficiently familiar with Hebrew affairs” to understand the rabbi’s plight, “having appearances and the leading Hebrews against him...Since the crucifixion of Christ,” Crosby declared, “no man has suffered at the hands of his own brethren for doing them good like Mr. Browne these eight years in this city...Rabbi Browne is the stoned prophet of our western Jerusalem, and judging by the great size of the stones and the gigantic (social) stature of those hurling them, the Rabbi must be a great and true prophet...”⁵³

Prophet or pariah? The question would haunt Browne throughout his life and becloud his legacy. He had no difficulty in getting another pulpit elsewhere, but never again would he find one so well situated as a base for his interests as that “broken-down little obscure congregation without even a house of worship of their own” in New York City. He served eight more congregations in the course of his active life, and spent his final years with his family in Georgia, where he died in 1929 at the age of 84. Sophie died seven years later, and both are buried in Atlanta.

CONCLUSION

Often Rabbi Rothschild would tease me about my great-grandfather, repeating the old saw about going “from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations.” He could not have known how much he actually did have in common with Browne, other than the fact that they were both rabbis and both served The Temple in Atlanta. Only after researching my ancestor did I realize how closely parallel they were in their perceptions regarding Judaism, citizenship and social justice. Rothschild dreamed of being a lawyer and once had the opportunity to plead a case in court, successfully defending a college professor who had been jailed for contempt during a civil rights trial. Rothschild viewed particular issues in the context of national and worldwide conditions, as Browne did, and like him believed that Jews—especially rabbis—had an obligation to speak out publicly and take action against all forms of oppression. Also like Browne, he addressed the entire community, Christians as well as Jews, formed collegial relationships with Christian ministers, and worked together with them for the public good. Perhaps best of all was the fact that both were blessed with a sharp wit and keen sense of humor.

They had one more thing in common: both married daughters of the congregations they served, which may or may not have been a blessing in either case. Fortunately for our family and

me, Rabbi Rothschild did not resemble Browne in his ability to keep a job. Both loved Atlanta from the get-go, but Rothschild managed to stay.

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1. *New York Times*, January 6, 1889; *The Southern Workman*, July 9, 1904, September 3, 1904.
 2. *The Southern Workman*, July 9, 1904; September 3, 1904.
 3. *Knickerbocker Press*, August 4, 1913; Browne to Theodor Herzl, August 9, 1897-December 9, 1897, Browne file, Herzl Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.
 4. Janice R. Blumberg, "Rabbi 'Alphabet' Browne: The Atlanta Years," *Southern Jewish History*, Vol. 5, 2.
 5. *Ibid.*, 3-5; Fred Grant to Browne, October 10, 1889 and February 17, 1893; Julia Grant Cantacuzene to Browne, December 4, 1927, Browne Collection, American Jewish Archives.
 6. Blumberg, "Rabbi 'Alphabet' Browne," 15-25.
 7. *Ibid.*, 28-34; *New York Sunday Herald*, February 4, 1883.
 8. *New York Jewish Herald*, March 9, 1883.
 9. Geraled Sorin, *A Time for Building* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore), 47-49.
 10. Diane Ravitch; *The Great School Wars: A History of New York City Public Schools*, 109; Sorin, *A Time for Building*, 136; .See Stephen Birmingham, *Our Crowd*, Harper & Row, New York, 1967; W. G. Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism*, World Union for Progressive Judaism, (New York, 1965), 342.
 11. The successful Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) had not yet been established; Not to be confused with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS, which was not organized until the Twentieth Century. Jacob Rader Marcus, *USJ III*, 442 , 103; David L. Harris, *Sod Jerusalems: Jewish Agricultural Communities in Frontier Kansas*, Chapter II, [http\www.kancoll.org/books/harris/sod_chap02.htm](http://www.kancoll.org/books/harris/sod_chap02.htm); *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol 6, 679.
 12. Recollections of daughter, Lylah Browne Goldberg; Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 101.
 13. Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 101-102, 179. Ann Novotny, *Strangers at the Door*, 52; Edward Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Story of Ellis Island*. 61, 283.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *New York Tribune*, October 15, 1882, 7.
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. *New York Daily Graphic*, August 8, 1885.

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18. Congressional Record, May 27, 1884, *NY Daily Graphic* 8/8/85, & *Washington Times*, August 13, 1918
19. Translated from the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, November 27, 1885, reproduced in *Die Deborah*, Cincinnati, December 4, 1885; Copy of telegram B to Fred Grant, August 6, 1885; Browne, AJA. [see note 24 essay].
20. *The New York Daily Graphic*, August 8, 1885 and August 9, 1885, Browne, AJA.
21. *The New York Sun*, November 27, 1885, from Associated Press dispatch, copy with illustration in Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 14.
22. *The Daily Telegraph*, January 7, 1896, copy in Portion of Book, Series C, Browne, AJA, 24-25.
23. Col. Elliot F. Sheppard to Isaac Frisch, January 15, 1889, text copied in Portion of Book, Series C, Browne, AJA, 140 n.
24. Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 23. Quote from *New York Tribune*, October 30, 1884.
25. Union League Club to Browne, undated, Browne, AJA; James G. Blaine to Browne, December 29, 1884, text in Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 123-4.
26. Col. Elliot F. Shepherd, publisher of *The New York Mail and Express*, to Isaac Frisch, 1/15/89, text in Portion of Book, Series C, Browne, AJA, np140.
27. Associated Press to *New York Herald*, October 22, 1886; copy of text in Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 15; *New York Tribune*, September 27, 1884, 5; Portion of Book, 173, Browne, AJA..
28. *Associated Press*, *New York Herald*, October 22, 1886, text with illustration in Portion of Book, Series C, Browne, 15. Lazare Isidor to Browne, September 3, 1884, AJA.
29. Ibid.
30. *New York Tribune*, January 2, 1887, text with illustration, ibid.
31. *New York Herald*, March 2, 1887; *The Jewish Messenger*, February 22, 1887.
32. *New York Herald*, March 2, 1887, text in Portion of Book, Series C, Browne, AJA, 16; *The Jewish Messenger*, February 25, 1887 and March 25, 1887.
33. *New York Jewish Daily News*, June 30, 1887.

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34. Copy, Browne to Elihu Root, Sept. 23, 1886, Browne, AJA; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1876.366-367; Sorin, *A Time For Building*, 193.
35. Browne to Benjamin Harrison, October 5, 1888; November 16, 1888, Benjamin Harrison Presidential Papers, LC; Portion of book, Browne, AJA.
36. Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, notes 119-122.
37. Browne to Harrison, November 16, 1888, Browne to Wise, August 15, 1888, *The Hebrew Leader*; quoted in Portion of Book, notes 120, 179. Browne, AJA.
38. Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, notes, 120.
39. Ibid, notes, 121.
40. Browne to Harrison, November 16, 1888, B, AJA
41. Browne to Harrison, January 7, 1889, April 22, 1889; September 25, 1889; March 5, 1891; November 24, 1891; November 24, 1892, LC.
42. Portion of book, Browne, AJA, 133-155; *New York Times*, August 4, 1887.
43. Portion of Book, 25, 147-150; Voucher, Mt. Sinai Congregation to Moses Weil, Browne, AJA.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid. 150. Sanger did not specify who these enemies were. Browne believed that the financier Jesse Seligman was behind much of what he saw as a cabal against him. Portion of Book, Browne, AJA, 173, and notes 119, 122, 132.
46. Ibid. 25-30; Schiff to Browne, October 10, 1904, Browne, AJA; Cane head with inscription in family collection.
47. Ibid., 30.
48. Portion of book, 26, 9-10. 181, Browne, AJA,
49. Ibid.
50. Portion of Book, Browne. AJA, 32-39.
51. Adolph Sanger to Committee January 14, 1889, copy in portion of book, footnotes p. 142, Browne, AJA.

52. Hamilton Fish to Committee, January 16, 1889, copy footnotes 139; copy Elliot F. Sheppard to Committee, footnotes 140,141; copy *Cleveland Gazette*, April 1, 1893, Browne, AJA.

53. Howard Crosby to Committee, copy footnotes 137, 138, Browne, AJA.