

Jewish Atty. Gen.

It is only natural for all Jews to swell with pride when a fellow-Jew is accorded high honor or designated for a high post. Have a look at the background of our new Attorney General, Ed Levi, and qvell.

By Jacob R. Marcus
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Edward Hirsch Levi, nominated by President Gerald Ford to head the Department of Justice, has just been confirmed by the Senate as Attorney General of the United States.

He is the first Jew to serve the cabinet in that office, though not the first Jew to be considered for the post, since Woodrow Wilson had thought of nominating Louis D. Brandeis, but had taken no action because Brandeis, still in his pre-Zionist phase, was deemed a radical. In 1804, Thomas Jefferson had discussed with Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin the appointment of Judge Moses Levy, of Philadelphia, as Attorney General, but Jefferson finally decided to bypass him. Levy, who came from a notable colonial family, had married out of the faith, and was not a member of the Jewish community.

Edward H. Levi, president of the University of Chicago since 1968 and a member of Chicago Sinai Congregation, can claim no colonial ancestry, but does come from one of the most remarkable rabbinical families in all American Jewish history.

Edward's father, Russian-born Rabbi Gerson Benedict Levi, received his early schooling in Glasgow, Scotland. When necessary in later years, Gerson Levi found it easy to conjure up a delightful Scottish burr -- with a twinkle in his eye. This Russo-Scottish Jewish family finally came to the United States where Gerson studied for the rabbinate at the Jewish Theological Seminary and earned a Ph. D. at the University of Pennsylvania. Elected to Phi Beta Kappa, he was also a member of the Z.B.T. fraternity, in its formative days a Zionist society ("Zion By Justice To be Redeemed").

The young clergyman, his Jewish Theological Seminary experience notwithstanding, settled in Chicago as a Reform rabbi and became known there as an accomplished Hebraist and Semitist; otherwise, one may be sure, Emil Gustav Hirsch would not have given him the hand of his beloved (and still living) daughter Elsa in marriage.

Gerson's father-in-law, Emil G. Hirsch, rabbi of the Sinai Congregation, deserves to be

remembered as one of the most distinguished and most scholarly rabbis of his day. For many years he also served as professor of Jewish studies at the University of Chicago. Hirsch and his friends took considerable interest in the University, and when it was reorganized in 1890, Sinai's wealthy Jews raised a substantial sum of money in order to match a proposed grant from John D. Rockefeller -- and appear to have saved the school.

Emil G. Hirsch was a great orator, an editor of the Reform Advocate, and the outstanding Jewish religious liberal of transallegny America as far West as the Pacific Coast. He preached on Sunday only, usually to a packed house. It was he who wrote Reform Judaism's social justice plank at the famous Pittsburgh Conference of 1885; prior to the rise of Stephen S. Wise in New York, Hirsch was unquestionably American Jewry's leading rabbinic fighter against the social ills of the Gilded Age. He was a Hebraist as well, and when he visited the Hebrew Union College in the days before America's entry into World War I, he and Dr. David Neumark, professor of philosophy, would pace the halls conversing in Hebrew, followed by a pack of admiring youngsters who were trying to understand what the two giants were talking about.

Hirsch's father was Dr. Samuel Hirsch, who had received his Ph. D. degree from Leipzig and had finally become chief rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The elder Hirsch, one of the outstanding Reform rabbis of Europe, an active leader in the continental conferences, which helped bring the new liberal theology to birth, was called to Philadelphia when he was already past the age of fifty. A learned philosopher, he had as a young rabbi in his twenties already written his magnum opus, The Religious Philosophy of the Jews. This religious radical, who in 1869 presided over the first left-wing rabbinical conference held in America, was not disinclined to hold religious services on Sunday and was called to Philadelphia when his friend Rabbi David Einhorn moved to New York.

It was in all probability Einhorn who induced his Philadelphia congregants to bring Hirsch from Luxembourg. Einhorn had come to America in 1855, leaving behind a Europe which would not accept his religious radicalism. His life there had been a series of disappointments. The brilliant, bold, and abrasive Einhorn was a native of Fuerth (where Secretary of State, Henry A. Kissinger was born in 1923). At seventeen, young Einhorn, raised as an Orthodox Jew, received a rabbinical certificate, but

moved speedily to the left, where ultimately his intransigent liberalism brought him not only leadership but bitter heartache. He finally left for Hungary, but the reactionary government there closed his synagogue, and he was no doubt happy to come to Baltimore's liberal Har Sinai pulpit in 1855.

Here, in his new American home, he established the monthly German language Sinai, undoubtedly in its day the country's most learned and liberal Jewish periodical. When the Civil War broke out and pro-South riots erupted in Baltimore, Einhorn, an outspoken anti-slavery man, was compelled to flee to Philadelphia where he officiated until 1866 when he moved on to New York. Three years before his death in 1879, Einhorn preached at the centennial of the Declaration of Independence. It was characteristically a powerful sermon praising America for its egalitarian ideals but denouncing the country's growing religious bigotry and its corruption in high places. The 1870's, one recalls, was the decade which witnessed the taint and the rottenness of the Grant administration.

One of Einhorn's daughters married Emil G. Hirsch, Edward Hirsch Levi's grandfather. Thus Samuel Hirsch and David Einhorn, two of the great figures in European liberal Judaism, are both great-grandfathers of Edward H. Levi. The Jewish Theological Seminary from which Gerson B. Levi had graduated has given Edward H. Levi an honorary degree as has the Hebrew Union College, which had also honored grandfather Emil G. Hirsch and had had for its president granduncle Kaufmann Kohler. Einhorn had been a bitter opponent of the more conservative Isaac M. Wise, the founder of Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College, but the Hirsch-Einhorn clan made their peace with the College when Kohler, who had married another of Einhorn's daughters, was elected its president in 1903.

Edward H. Levi is fully able to stand on his own two feet. His eminent career at the University of Chicago, which he served as law school Dean and University provost as well as president, has made this abundantly clear. But surely it can be only a source of added strength for him to be able to look back to a family which includes a learned father, an illustrious grandfather, and two remarkable great-grandfathers.

Levi's new post is a tremendous challenge, but with his own native ability and the shades of his forefathers hovering benevolently over his shoulders, one ventures to predict that his chances after Watergate of rehabilitating the office of Attorney General are excellent.

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