

“We Must Unite on Principles!” The Letters of Kaufmann Kohler to David Philipson and Renewed Light on The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885

by Zev Eleff

In December 1883, Rabbi David Philipson settled into his first pulpit position, at Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore.¹ For the twenty-one-year-old rabbi, Reform Judaism in Baltimore must have been a somewhat jarring experience. Har Sinai featured a “Radical Reform” ritual and culture incubated decades earlier by Rabbi David Einhorn. Trained inside the more Americanized and “Moderate Reform” circle of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, Philipson seemed to have adjusted quite well.² In fact, just two years into his Baltimore rabbinate, the young rabbi reached out to the rabbi of New York’s Congregation Beth El, Kaufmann Kohler—the late Einhorn’s son-in-law—to inquire about updating the local Reform worship.

Kohler turned down Philipson’s offer, at least initially. Nevertheless, Philipson’s interest in reinvigorating Reform Judaism in the 1880s initiated a correspondence between him and Kohler that helped spark formative steps in the development of Reform Judaism in the United States. In particular, Kohler’s letters to his younger colleague demonstrate the development of his thoughts that led, in short order, to the fateful rabbinical conference at the Concordia Club House in Allegheny City, just a few miles outside of Pittsburgh. In November 1885, nineteen Reform rabbis met to establish the pivotal Pittsburgh Platform, a set of eight principles that unofficially established the planks of “Classical Reform Judaism” and irrevocably separated this group from more traditional rabbis and Jewish laypeople in the United States.³ The platform offered liberal interpretations of key theological issues such as the nature of God, the Bible, the Talmud, and Jewish messianism. Its final statement engaged Reform Judaism’s role in the realm of social justice.

For decades, scholars of American Jewish history have offered “much too simple” explanations for the formation of the so-called Pittsburgh Platform. This had much to do with the one-sided editorials that

appeared in Wise's newspaper, the *American Israelite*. Some historians argued that Kohler and others were propelled to action by religiously conservative agitators, while others claimed that it was Felix Adler and those to Kohler's "left" that set the Reform rabbis into motion.⁴ These never-before-published letters confirm that both forces played crucial roles in the steps leading to Pittsburgh.

Moreover, the correspondence reveals that in the beginning, Kohler had much more modest goals in mind for the convention. In his letters to Philipson, Kohler wrote about other recent rabbinical conferences that took up specific and more mundane issues relating to Jewish education and philanthropy. At first, Kohler outlined an agenda for a late 1885 conference—at one point, it appeared to him that it would meet in Baltimore—that would engage prayer book revisions and Reform Sunday school curricula; hardly out of character with earlier rabbinical conventions. These were matters that had weighed on Kohler and Philipson for some time. Amid all of the commotion—in the summer of 1885, Kohler engaged in a very public debate with the traditionalist newcomer, Rabbi Alexander Kohut—these plans evolved into a much more grandiose affair. In his own words, Kohler told Philipson, "We cannot afford to be constantly maligned and anathematized for every reform measure or liberal view expressed." In the correspondence that ensued after the Pittsburgh conference, Kohler, still thinking in grand form, solicited Philipson's support for a Reform organ, intended to promulgate the renewed Reform spirit. These letters, then, seem to clarify some points but complicate the historical narrative.

In addition, the Kohler letters throw light on and reinforce other important matters. First, Kohler understood that to invigorate his Reform program he required the aid of a younger generation of Reform leaders. Sensibly, then, he looked to Philipson, one of the four inaugural graduates of Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 1883. On several occasions, Kohler asked Philipson to recruit the other members of his ordination class and other newly minted Reform rabbis to support their cause. He was therefore in line at this historical moment with others who intended to "revive" Jewish religious and cultural spirits through the energies of young people.⁵ Kohler sought out young leaders, despite that he was in all likelihood rather unfamiliar with them personally and, most certainly, the full extent of their views on Reform. Quite revealing, Kohler

at first misspelled Philipson's and others' names. Toward the final set of letters, however, the New York rabbi indicated his growing familiarity with Philipson and the new generation of Reform rabbis; he even broke from his usual formal tone to congratulate and gossip about Philipson's recent engagement.

Other significant themes and information also come to bear in this correspondence. First, the correspondence explains the reasons that the proceedings of the Pittsburgh conference were delayed and, when they finally appeared, were flawed. Most historians have repeated Wise's claim that the publication committee abandoned its charge.⁶ However, Kohler did his best to produce the minutes in a timely fashion. To his consternation, it was Philipson who did not maintain satisfactory recordings of the proceedings; Kohler was forced to ask the conference delegates to reproduce their remarks and conversations, a protracted task that proved rather imprecise. Second, Kohler's letters emphasize his desire to reaffirm the religious views of his father-in-law, Einhorn, and partner with Wise and his rabbinical and congregational institutions. In truth, most of the Reform principles agreed upon in Pittsburgh—on the utility of sacred texts, resurrection of the dead, and messianism—were codified in 1869, at a rabbinical conference in Philadelphia led by Einhorn.⁷ However, Wise departed from that earlier convention gravely disappointed in its outcomes and spent considerable energies stymieing its progress. Much aware of this, Kohler explained to Philipson the need to reestablish those same Reform ideas while maintaining good relations with Wise and the institutions that he controlled.

It is therefore altogether fortunate that Philipson saved the letters he received from his senior colleague. They are preserved in the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. In all, ten letters from Kohler's pen can be found in the David Philipson Papers. Unfortunately, it appears that the other side of the correspondence is no longer extant. Attempts to locate Philipson's postcards and letters to Kohler in archives and synagogue collections have turned up emptyhanded. In addition, Kohler probably sent along a few other letters to Philipson that have been lost. In his autobiography, Philipson quoted at length from a letter that he had received from Kohler, encouraging the former to attend the meetings in Pittsburgh: "Dear Doctor, I hope you will not disappoint us. We cannot spare you, particularly at the prayer-book meeting.

Besides, let us concentrate our forces and accomplish something creditable and worthy of a conference of rabbis! We must have you, and I wish you would prepare or suggest something in the way of practical reform! Yours cordially, Dr. K. Kohler.”⁸ Still, the extant letters from Kohler to Philipson offer a remarkable portal into the mind of a leading architect of Reform Judaism in the United States and the circumstances and conditions that led to a formative benchmark in the history of American Judaism.

New York, March 17, 1885

My dear Dr. Philippson [*sic*]!

Please excuse my delay in answering your letter regarding the new English Translation of Dr. Einhorn’s Prayer Book.⁹ The chief cause of my delay is that I am compelled to state to you that after the consultations I had I do not feel encouraged to take any part in the work. It seems to me the real desire for an English translation is not felt by the people here nor elsewhere, and it is certainly not advisable to incur new expenses with the risk of simply adding another Prayer book to the many in use or in print.¹⁰

I, therefore, advise you to drop the plan and improve the one you use as well as you can.

Hoping to hear again from you, I am

With cordial greetings

Yours

Dr. K. Kohler

N.B. At our next conference in Philadelphia we shall, I hope, discuss the matter more explicitly.¹¹

New York, June 15th, 1885

My dear Dr. Philippson [*sic*]!

Although I failed to receive an answer to my last note concerning the Prayer book question, I presume you are still inclined to work, if possible and made feasible to you, in unison with us, and I therefore take pleasure in informing you that

during the stay of Dr. E.G. Hirsch, my brother-in-law, and Dr. [Lippman] Mayer of Pittsburg in this city, we have, with the consent of my mother-in-law, come to the conclusion to take the revision of the English Prayer book into our hands.¹²

Our plan is to issue a call to all the prominent ministers of Reform Congregations who are likely and willing to take part in the work of preparing a [*sic*] English Prayer book on the basis of Dr. Einhorn's and under the old title, and to have several important changes introduced with the view of having

1., the Hebrew printed on one page and the English on the other,

2., the Psalms and other Biblical passages divided in a manner to enable the Congregations to recite the latter half of each verse as responses (as it was formerly done in the Synagogue.)

3., New Psalms and additional prayers inserted in order to render our Sabbath Ritual less stereotype and monotonous.

4., to expurgate the Ritual from every vestige of old prejudice and hatred;

5., to issue alongside with the Sabbath Ritual, a Ritual of Domestic Devotion and for public and private use on special occasions of joy and sorrow.

6., The whole work is to be submitted to a Revision Committee which is to include laymen, experts in music and in Church Rituals!

The first Convention, or Conference is to take place in October at Baltimore. Of course, what anyone of us could in the meantime prepare for the Conference will be received with thanks and utilized.

Hoping that this step will suit you, I request you to kindly inform Mr. [William] Raynor [*sic*] of it, and at once to communicate with Dr. [Solomon] Sonneschein and sound him about it.¹³ I hope he will be satisfied with this. I may hint to you or tell you in discretion that Dr. [Max] Landsberg declared privately his willingness to join us and waive his own privileges and claims as a Prayerbook writer in case we have the cooperation of all the עולת תמיד [Olat Tamid] ministers secured.¹⁴

With best regards and awaiting a speedy reply

I am

Yours

Dr. K. Kohler

New York, July 3d, 1885

My dear Dr. Philipson!

Excuse my long delay in answering your letter of June 17th but you may guess the reason from the papers. I am afraid the state of affairs has been greatly affected by Dr. [Alexander] Kohut's attitude and the press that fawns him.¹⁵ And I think it is for the good. Reform requires consolidation. We cannot afford to be constantly maligned and anathematized for every reform measure or liberal view expressed. I felt I was fighting for the cause of progress. But whether I shall now be regarded the fit leader of SS [Sabbath School] Reform for entire American Judaism, I most certainly doubt. In fact, I have been advised long ago to undertake the SS Reform on behalf of Reform Judaism, and I think this is the best and the most prospective step.¹⁶

Let us at once revise both Prayer book, or Ritual, and Sabbath School system. Those that shall respond to my call to be issued two weeks or three before the Conference takes place are certainly all welcome. Or if Dr. [Gustav] Gottheil wishes to issue the call I am satisfied but I shall not venture to ask [Fredrick De Sola] Mendes for signature!—"Warum? Darum!" [literally: "Why? That's why!"]¹⁷

The two points mentioned by you in regard to the English Prayerbook have my full endorsement. We sadly need a Reform organ.¹⁸ Would or could you work for the support, financial and literary, of such a one?! I am leaving for the country next week, longing for a little rest, but expect to hear soon from you under usual address. I presume you will attend the Convention at St. Louis.¹⁹

Cordially Yours,

Dr. K. Kohler

New York, September 21st, 1885

My dear Dr. Philipson!

Thanks for your postal card. I owe you an answer yet to your letter which reached me in the Catskills. The fact is I am still uncertain what to do in regard to the Eastern Conference.²⁰ I have not the least faith in the J.'s and the whole משפחה [family]!²¹ Nor does all the talk there lead to any result. On the contrary, they have now Dr. Kohut to help them drive things backward.²² We need consolidation of Reform. We must unite on principles! We want work, actions, and concerted action! I have just this moment written a letter to Dr. [Isaac Mayer] Wise and Dr. [Bernhard] Felsenthal, Sonneschein and others, proposing a Reform Conference either at Baltimore or at Pittsburg for the 2nd week of October.²³ I expect their immediate answer, as I request you to send yours on enclosed postal card, so that I can proceed in the matter. You understand I want not merely a Conference but united and permanent work! which includes a Reform organ! See what you can do in the matter.

Hoping that you passed the ימים הנוראים [High Holy Days] well and to the best satisfaction of yourself and wishing you a year crowned with success and blessing,

I am yours very truly

Dr. K. Kohler

New York, September 28th 1885

Rev. Dr. D. Philipson!

Dear young friend and Colleague!

In answers to your two postals, I wish to simply inform you that I received several very favorable replies to my propositions regarding a Reform Conference. The question only is where can we best expect to get them together. I think the best would be after all to induce all the advocates of our cause to meet with us at Baltimore, or, if this is not feasible, to have a Reform Conference right on top of the other at Pittsburg say on the

14th and 15th of October. The two Dr. Hirsch's [*sic*] would go to Pittsburg and probably Wise from whom I expect an answer within a few days.²⁴ In the meantime I wish you would communicate with [Joseph] Krauskopf, [Henry] Berk[owitz], [Israel] Aaron and Soneshin [*sic*] and see what can be done in the matter.²⁵ The earlier the better. On the 20th of October I must be in the city again. Let me hear from you soon.

N.B. We want men who work for Reform and at the same time are for the Union!²⁶ I just received the distressful news that poor Dr. [Abraham] Ilch died suddenly from heart's disease!²⁷ Hoping that you enjoy the best of health after the strain of the holy season's work.

I am yours truly
Dr. K. Kohler

New York, Oct. 19th 1885

My dear Dr. Philipson,

From the circular just read I learn that the Conference is to take place anyhow.²⁸ I am engaged the Sunday evening previous and the Tuesday evening following the 26th inst. so that it would be [*sic*] actually compel me to break previous engagements would I attend.

Thus far I spoke formally to you as Secretary.

Personally I place no faith nor hope in the Conference as long as the spirit of Eastern Particularism and Disunion prevails.

I am very anxious to see a Reform Conference brought together in which the chief representatives of the Union and of Reform as well as all those particularly interested in our Sabbath School Union and Prayer Book Revision would participate. Dr. Sonneshein [*sic*] informs me of his coming here this week and I am very anxious to see matters brought to a tangible shape.²⁹ Dr. Wise favors a Conference at Pittsburg, and so do both Dr. Hirsch[es]. Please inform us as soon as possible of the results of your Conference with reference to our mutual interests, which also include the project of a Teacher's Seminary at New York in place of Dr. Gottheil's mismanaged Temple Emanuel's Preparatory School.³⁰

Wishing you the best success I remain

Yours very truly
Dr. K. Kohler

P.S. Your postal was just received and will only add that finding that our friends betrayed little desire to go to Baltimore. I decided to have a Reform Conference convened, and I just received a very encouraging letter from Dr. Krauskopf who is heart and soul with us. I think I shall propose Pittsburg as place and November 16th as the time for the Conference. Dr. Sonneshein [*sic*] will be here tomorrow night, and I shall see what can be arranged.

More anon. Yours

Dr. K.

New York, November 23rd, 1885

My dear Philipson!

I trust you are hale and hearty after the great fight which seems to have awaited you on your arrival at Baltimore to judge from what the telegraphic reports told us yesterday about the Baltimore Jews.³¹ Never mind, my friend. This only shows that we have struck the mark.

Now the first and foremost object before us is to have a good report of our proceedings, and I request you to be as prompt as possible in copying and sending me the same.³² By the way, was there any decision given concerning the mode of publication and the means with which the expenses are to be defrayed? If nothing was arranged, I shall have them published by one who gives the best security of spreading them broadcast all over the country, and such an [*sic*] one I have found, I think. Please give an early reply to

Yours very truly

Best regards from my wife and family
Dr. K. Kohler

New York, November 28th 1885

Dear Dr. Philipson!

Thanks for your letter and postal cards as well for the interesting document. I mean Dr. [Benjamin] Szold's exquisite harangue!—and also for your prompt dispatch of the

Proceedings. Your last Postal card told exactly what I wanted to suggest to you. I shall have each part submitted to each participant in the discussion of the respective subject, so as to have the report made as exact and as careful as it is possible under the circumstances! We better be cautious beforehand than expose ourselves to our malevolent enemies!

My Congregation and the liberal element throughout the city are in full sympathy with the results, but all the more do the papers clamor and rage. Still let once our Reform organ appear and I have great hopes I shall be able to start one here as the Israelite will never do for us in the East! —, and they will become terror-stricken! What do you say to Felix Adler's Alliance with the orthodox?³³ This shows, as I remarked in the pulpit, scare on the part of the Ethical Culturists and prognosticates good results for the Reform movement.

In case you have Dr. Hirsch's original amendment preserved, please send it to me.³⁴ I presume I shall have several weeks work yet until the report can appear!

With best regards from my wife and family

Yours truly

Dr. K. Kohler

New York, Dec. 2nd 1885

Dr. Philipson!

In reply to your letter I would request you to let me have all the various propositions you still possess. I meant Hirsch's motion regarding the Social Question (paragraph 8 of the Platform).

I am especially at a loss what to do regarding the Revelation and Immortality Discussion which you have not at all recorded in the minutes.³⁵ I presume I have to write to each to let me have a brief statement of what he said on the same.

Your eloquent and stirring address I read with great pleasure and especially enjoyed your pitching back to the Rev. gentlemen.³⁶ Orthodoxy here is still furious, and the men of the cloth want to make it warm for me here; but I am not afraid.³⁷ I shall please God by the first of January have a Reform organ started under the name of the Jewish Reformer and I intend taking

Sonneshein [*sic*] and Hirsch as co-editors. Hoping that you will with all our friends, help to make it a success.

The time has arrived when we must become aggressive, and victory will be ours.

Closing with sincere regards from all my folks

I am yours truly

Dr. K. Kohler

New York, Dec. 8th, 1885

Dear Dr. Philipson!

Before all my heartiest Congratulations again on your betrothal!³⁸ Did you not receive my dispatch last Sunday? You do not mention it in your letter from yesterday. Wasn't Mrs. Oettinger right anyway? She whispered the secret to me! And now to serious matters. Our Conference proceedings are not finished yet. I wait for further reports from Dr. [Isaac] Moses and [Aaron] Hahn. I am in no particular hurry either. I want to be as exact and as careful as possible. I shall send you the proof sheets at the beginning of next week for revision! And shall do the same to all our friends. Isn't that the best thing we can do?

I intend publishing them simultaneously in my new paper, The Jewish Reformer and in the Israelite about the first of January.³⁹ Of course to be published in pamphlet form afterwards! Sonneshein [*sic*] hesitating, I offered coeditorship to Dr. Moses, and I now count on all of you to lend your active support to the paper.

We shall first of all maintain the dignity of the press and leave the belittling and the howling to the orthodox! Please send in some correspondence from Baltimore giving your account of the acceptance of the Platform!

I see you have Holy day Service in company with Mayer Moses and myself!

With best regards

Yours very truly!

ושמחת בכלתך [Rejoice in your bride!]

Dr. K. Kohler

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Notes

Several friends and colleagues helped decipher Kaufmann Kohler's handwriting and share their thoughts on these extraordinary letters. I therefore offer my thanks to Dana Herman, Michael A. Meyer, Michael Miller, Kevin Proffitt, Gary P. Zola, and, most especially, Jonathan D. Sarna, for their support and generosity of time and patience.

¹“Local,” *American Israelite* (28 December 1883): 7.

²In 1888, Philipson returned to Cincinnati and attempted to implement a number of Einhorn-style reforms at K. K. Bene Israel Congregation (now Rockdale Temple). These new Reform ideas and rituals led to a painful falling out between Philipson and his longtime mentor, Wise. See Stanley F. Chyet, “Isaac Mayer Wise: Portraits by David Philipson,” in *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram Wallace Korn (New York: Ktav, 1976), 77–91.

³The best survey of this episode and the fuller history of Reform Judaism in Europe and the United States is Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁴Jonathan D. Sarna, “New Light on the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885,” *American Jewish History* 76 (March 1987): 360. On Felix Adler, see Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1979).

⁵On this, see Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Late Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Awakening,” in *Religious Diversity and American Religious History: Studies in Traditions and Cultures*, ed. Walter H. Conser Jr. and Sumner B. Twiss (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 1–25.

⁶See Isaac M. Wise, “A Record of American Judaism for A.M. 5646,” *American Jews' Annual* (1886–1887): 64.

⁷See Sefton D. Temkin, *The New World of Reform: Containing the Proceedings of the Conference of Reform Rabbis Held in Philadelphia in November 1869, Translated from the German with an Introduction and Notes* (London: Leo Baeck College, 1971).

⁸David Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew: An Autobiography* (Cincinnati: John G. Kidd & Son, Inc., 1941), 50.

⁹In 1858, Einhorn published his *Olat Tamid*, a “Radical Reform” prayer book. In its initial incarnation, just a few American congregations adopted it as a standard ritual. It started to gain momentum when republished in 1862. For the reception of Reform prayer books in the United States, see Zev Eleff, *Who Rules the Synagogue? Religious Authority and the Formation of American Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 114–121.

¹⁰In 1872, Einhorn commissioned a translation of his prayer book into English. Decades later, Kohler wrote that this “first attempt was a failure. The translation lacked the requirements of a prayerbook because the translator lacked the heart and the fervor of a religious soul.” In 1896, Einhorn’s son-in-law, Emil G. Hirsch, issued a new “brilliant translation” of the prayer book that was far better received. See Kaufmann Kohler, “David Einhorn, the Uncompromising Champion of Reform Judaism,” *Year Book of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* 19 (1909): 255.

¹¹In April 1885, twenty rabbinical delegates of the Hebrew Ministers of New York and the Adjacent States met for a multiday conference at Rodef Shalom in Philadelphia. The group included Orthodox men such as Sabato Morais and Henry Schneebarger as well as Reform leaders such as Kohler and Philipson. On the whole, the convention focused on charity work and education. See “Two Conferences,” *American Israelite* (24 April 1885): 5.

¹²Einhorn died in 1879. Posthumously, his widow, Julia Ochs Einhorn, held final say on the publication rights and decisions of Rabbi Einhorn’s writings.

¹³William S. Rayner was a founder of Har Sinai in Baltimore and an important proponent of Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century. A member of the subsequent generation of Reform Jewish leadership, Solomon H. Sonneschein, was a controversial figure and at this time the rabbi of Shaare Emeth Congregation in St. Louis. On the latter’s career, see Benny Kraut, “A Unitarian Rabbi? The Case of Solomon H. Sonneschein,” in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 272–308.

¹⁴In 1884, Landsberg published *Ritual for Jewish Worship* for the use of his Temple B’rith Kodesh in Rochester. Landsberg was deeply influenced by Einhorn, and his new English ritual carried the potential to serve as the standard radical Reform worship in the United States. In the following year, he was unable to attend the Pittsburgh rabbinical conference but afterward offered that the “platform adopted expresses my views exactly.” See “Reformation in Israel,” *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* (19 November 1885): 6.

¹⁵In 1885, Alexander Kohut migrated to New York from Hungary. He assumed the pulpit at the prominent Congregation Ahawath Chesed. That same year, the traditional-leaning Kohut challenged the legitimacy of Reform Judaism in a series of Sabbath lectures. In response, Kohler, at nearby Beth El, launched his own talks in defense of the Reform position. A number of Jewish newspapers covered and published the texts of the Kohut-Kohler debate, stirring commotion and drawing the interest of many American Jewish communities. See Eleff, *Who Rules the Synagogue?* 192–198.

¹⁶In January 1885, Kohler delivered a paper on the “Concerted Action in Sabbath-School Reform,” at a New York rabbinical conference. In his remarks, Kohler declared that these schools “altogether lack method and system. The arbitrariness prevailing there is simply appalling.” Instead, the speaker wished to implement a standard curriculum for Jewish teachers. Later at the Philadelphia conference, Kohler offered a resolution that indicated concerns for Reform Sabbath schools. He moved for the establishment of a “conference of Sabbath-school superintendents [that] should be held annually for the purpose of discussing all the important questions and problems in order to be able to take action on such points on which an agreement is feasible and possible.” The resolution caused some commotion, as it appeared to a number of Midwestern rabbis that the Easterners were duplicating the formers’ efforts on this educational front. See K. Kohler, “Concerted Action in Sabbath-School Reform,” *American Hebrew* (23 January 1885): 164.

¹⁷Gustav Gottheil was the senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in New York, one of the leading Reform congregations in the United States. In contrast, De Sola Mendes was described by one observer at this time as a “namby-pamby” Reform rabbi who was somewhat alienated from both Reform and Orthodox rabbinical leaders. For the latter description, see Leah Levitz Fishbane, “Common Bonds: A Collective Portrait,” in *Jewish Renaissance and Revival in America: Essays in Memory of Leah Levitz Fishbane*, ed. Eitan P. Fishbane and Jonathan D. Sarna (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 25–26.

¹⁸From 1869–1879, Kohler and other Reform rabbis published articles in the New York-based *Jewish Times* (later titled *The Reformer and Jewish Times*), edited by Moritz Ellinger. In the early 1880s, the Rabbinical Literary Association published two volumes of the Cincinnati-based *Hebrew Review*, but it ceased after the death of its president, Max Lilienthal. Kohler and others contributed to this Reform-minded periodical and in the mid-1880s hoped for a new organ to disseminate their views.

¹⁹In July 1885, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations held its ninth annual conference at the Harmonie Club in St. Louis. While it was the UAHC’s largest convention to date, few congregations in New York or on the West Coast sent delegates. Directly before the meeting, HUC held its first annual alumni convention in the same location. See “The Ninth Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations,” *American Israelite* (24 July 1885): 4. On this, see Martin B. Ryback, “The East-West Conflict in American Reform Judaism,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 4 (January 1952): 3–25.

²⁰The 1880s witnessed the emergence of regional rabbinical conferences. In April 1885, rabbis in the South met at Tulane Hall in New Orleans. The “Eastern” rabbis in Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia had also started to form a rabbinical fraternity, as did Jewish divines in the Midwest. See “Two Conferences,” *American Israelite* (24 April 1885): 5. On the emergence of regional rabbinical conferences, see Gary Phillip Zola, “Southern Rabbis and the Founding of the First National Association of Rabbis,” *American Jewish History* 85 (December 1997): 353–372.

²¹By this, Kohler may have had in mind Marcus Jastrow and Benjamin Szold, whose theological views were far more conservative than Kohler's and whose communally active children had married one another. See Michal Galas, *Rabbi Marcus Jastrow and His Vision for the Reform of Judaism: A Study in the History of Judaism in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Anna Tilles (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 152–158.

²²In his debates with Kohut, Kohler described the traditionalists as “backward” and his Reform colleagues as a group who endeavored to move American Judaism “forward.” See K. Kohler, *Studies, Addresses, and Personal Papers* (New York: Bloch, 1931), 201–235.

²³Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati was a leading Reform rabbi in the United States and the founding president of Hebrew Union College, the only rabbinical seminary in the United States at this time. More progressive but less influential, Bernhard Felsenthal of Chicago was a well-known Reform advocate and leader in the Jewish fraternal society, Independent Order of B'nai B'rith.

²⁴Samuel Hirsch of Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia and the more progressive Emil G. Hirsch of Congregation Sinai in Chicago were influential Reform rabbis.

²⁵Along with Philipson, Israel Aaron, Henry Berkowitz, and Joseph Krauskopf were the members of the first graduating class of HUC in 1883. Together, with Sonnenschein, Kohler considered these five among the leading lights of Reform Judaism's next generation and hoped that Philipson might recruit them to support this initiative.

²⁶In the nineteenth century and particularly after the word gained significant traction during the Civil War, Isaac Mayer Wise had used “union” to describe his plan to unite America's Jews. The term was deliberately employed in the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (est. 1873) and Hebrew Union College (est. 1875). In the 1880s, it became increasingly clear that only Reform rabbis and laypeople would join Wise's “union” initiatives. Kohler, Wise's eventual successor at HUC, also aspired to union but not with any major compromises to his vision for Reform Judaism.

²⁷Born in Albany, Abraham Illch studied at Columbia College and the short-lived Temple Emanu-El Theological Seminary. Afterward, he traveled to Europe and earned a doctorate at the University of Leipzig. Kohler and others held much hope for the American-born prodigy and mourned the twenty-seven-year-old's death, shortly after Illch assumed a rabbinical position at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. See Jacob Voorsanger, *The Chronicles of Emanu-El* (San Francisco: G. Spaulding & Co., 1990), 168–169.

²⁸On 25 September 1885, the *American Israelite* published a notice for the “Third Conference of the Jewish Minister's Association,” to be held at Har Sinai in Baltimore. Per Kohler's earlier request, Gustav Gottheil was named president of the upcoming meeting, but Fredrick De Sola Mendes was still involved as secretary, as was Philipson for the convention that would primarily engage “Sunday-school education.” See “The Third Eastern Conference,” *American Israelite* (25 September 1885): 7.

²⁹In an interview with the New York Jewish press, Sonneschein explained: "I came East for two reasons. My main object was to ascertain the arrangements made for the revision of the late Dr. Einhorn's English ritual. It was necessary to urge this matter, inasmuch as congregations in the West are clamoring for such a revision. There will be no change whatsoever in the system and the principle of the prayer-book. The revision is to be simply a matter of perfection and addition, and will be thoroughly done. Each part of the book will be in the hands of a competent committee, and the entire work under the care of Dr. Kohler... I intended to go to Baltimore to see my brethren assembled there, and to try whether or not I could induce them to consolidate their contemplated Sabbath-school movement with the one that originated at the late Council in St. Louis." In the end, Sonneschein did not travel to Baltimore, understanding that "it would be better to let matters take their own shape." See "Dr. Sonneschein's Views," *Jewish Messenger* (30 October 1885): 4.

³⁰Founded in the mid-1870s, the Emanu-El Preparatory School was intended to be an "eastern branch" of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. In 1879, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations assumed responsibility for the New York school. American Jews were not of one mind on the preparatory school. In the 1880s, some believed that it had "deservedly earned its [good] reputation" while others wondered aloud, "What is the matter with the Temple Emanu-El Preparatory School?" See Myer Stern, *The Rise and Progress of Reform Judaism: Embracing a History Made from the Official Records of Temple Emanu-El of New York* (New York: Myer Stern, 1895), 69.

³¹Immediately after the conference, Benjamin Szold of Baltimore's Oheb Shalom Congregation attacked the Pittsburgh conference, as well as other Reform initiatives. Mostly, Szold interpreted the Pittsburgh principles as a "denouncement" of Judaism and a repudiation of basic Jewish beliefs. Moreover, to Szold, the rabbinical conference sought to rebuff the efforts of past religious leaders who utilized more traditional Jewish theology to position Jews as people who "participate in all humane enterprises and are in favor of all that tends toward the elevation of the human race." See "Our Baltimore Letter," *American Hebrew* (27 November 1885): 34. See also Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), 183.

³²In 1887, Isaac Mayer Wise alleged that the "committee appointed to publish the proceedings neglected its duty." Contrary to this account, it appears from Kohler's letter that he and others attempted to furnish proceedings but encountered considerable obstacles that had more to do with secretarial coordination. See Wise, "A Record of American Judaism," 64.

³³On 22 November 1885, Felix Adler delivered a very well-attended lecture on "Modern Reform Judaism." The founder of the Ethical Culture Movement described Reform leaders as "teachers of nothing" and "weak imitators of the Christianity which puts faith before the law and belief before good works." Kohler—Adler's longtime nemesis, when the former was stationed in Chicago during the 1870s—likened this name-calling to the sort hurled by traditionalist leaders. See Felix Adler, "Reformed Judaism," *Jewish Messenger* (27 November 1885): 5.

³⁴Emil G. Hirsch was chiefly responsible for the eighth principle that anticipated the Social Gospel Movement's desire to "regulate the relation between rich and poor" and to "solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." See W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965), 34.

³⁵At the behest of Kohler, the delegates at Pittsburgh declared in their seventh principle that they believed that the "soul of man is immortal." However, the group rejected "as ideas not rooted in Judaism the belief both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (hell and paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward." See Plaut, *Growth of Reform Judaism*, 34.

³⁶Upon returning to Baltimore, Philipson delivered nine sermons to defend each Reform principle articulated by his colleagues in Pittsburgh. Unrelenting, Philipson lashed out against critics—those "self-appointed judges"—of the conference, labeling them "half-hearted hypocrites" and "would be reformers." See Robert W. Ross, "The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885: One Hundred Years Old," in *The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect*, ed. Walter Jacob (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1985), 66–70.

³⁷In New York, the two traditional-leaning newspapers, the *American Hebrew* and *Jewish Messenger*, published a number of critical editorials on the Pittsburgh conference. However, Orthodox rabbis in Gotham remained somewhat quiet in the public sphere. Privately, Rev. Henry Pereira Mendes of Shearith Israel wrote to Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler of the British Commonwealth to complain bitterly about the "manifesto" and Reform's "gradual and steady approach of Unitarian Christian" but was at a loss on how to publicly react. In fact, it was the Philadelphia rabbinate—led by Sabato Morais—that articulated the earliest and most vocal censure of the Reform rabbis. See "Opinions of Philadelphia Jewish Ministers on the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference," *Jewish Record* (27 November 1885): 2. For Mendes's letter, see Henry Pereira Mendes to Nathan Adler, 27 May 1886, ACC/2805/02/01/093, London Metropolitan Archives, London, England.

³⁸In 1885, Philipson began a courtship with Ella Hollander, one of twenty who regularly attended the rabbi's Bible class. By Philipson's own account, "it was soon common gossip that the young rabbi had lost his heart." The couple announced their engagement in December, as Philipson described it, "shortly after I returned from the most important gathering I had yet attended in my brief rabbinical career." See Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew*, 49–50.

³⁹Kohler coedited the *Jewish Reformer* with Emil Hirsch and Isaac Moses. Kohler published an "authentic report" of the rabbinical conference's proceedings in the first edition of the short-lived New York-based newspaper. See Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism*, 31.