



Courtesy of William J. Cresson, Jr.

WARDER CRESSON



THE
Pennsylvania
Magazine
 OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

*Quaker, Shaker, Rabbi:
 Warder Cresson, The Story of a
 Philadelphia Mystic*

*"Nathan had sprung from worthy stock—
 Austere, ascetical, but free . . ."*¹

“IN THE Spring of 1844, I left everything near and dear to me on earth. I left the wife of my youth and six lovely children . . . an excellent farm, with everything comfortable around me.”² With these words, Warder Cresson, a member of a well-known Philadelphia Quaker family, described his decision to accept an appointment as the first American Consul to Jerusalem. A religious dissenter, a pioneering Zionist, the author of numerous works of theology, the subject of a bizarre suit for lunacy brought against him by his wife and children when he returned from Palestine a Jew, Cresson was an unusual personality in an age notable for self-proclaimed prophets, men who strained to see the vision of a New Jerusalem through the rising pall of an industrial age. Yet there has

¹ W. E. Bezanson, ed., *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, by Herman Melville (New York, 1960), 57.

² Warder Cresson, *The Key of David* (Philadelphia, 1852), 2.

been no comprehensive account of his interesting and unconventional life, only a short article dealing with Cresson's Zionism.³

Descended from Pierre Cresson, a Huguenot who came to America in 1657, the Cresson family had long been active in business and philanthropy, the intertwined interests of many outstanding Friends. Their steady rise in society was reflected in marriage ties with such established Quaker families as the Emlens and the Robertses. Warder's father, John Elliot Cresson, was a prominent conveyancer whose office was on High Street. In 1794, he married Mary Warder. The second of their eight children, Warder, was born on July 13, 1798.⁴

Little is known of Warder's formative years. That his was a strict upbringing in keeping with the habits of his Quaker elders is clear from the few family records available.⁵ In 1815, a year following his father's death, the boy was sent away to work on the family farms in Darby and Chester. From statements Cresson made later in life, he worked hard, saved his money and learned a great deal about agriculture. In 1819, when twenty-one, he rejoined his family, then residing in Byberry Township, north of Philadelphia.⁶ Two

³ A. J. Karp, "The Zionism of Warder Cresson," *Papers of the American-Jewish Historical Society and Theodor Herzl Foundation* (New York, 1958), 1-20; Max J. Kohler, "Some Early American Zionist Projects," *Publications of the American-Jewish Historical Society*, VIII (1900), 75-118. Nahum Sokolow, in his *History of Zionism, 1600-1918* (New York, 1969), 136-137, has called Cresson a "great Zionist," and has described the colony founded by him as "one of the pioneer enterprises of its kind." More recently, Cresson is noted in James A. Field, Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Princeton, 1969), 276-280, 292, 296, 324. I am especially indebted to William J. Cresson, Jr., for allowing me to use a photograph of his great-grandfather, showing him with the traditional head covering, the *yarmulke*. Other family photographs, a copy of Warder Cresson's marriage certificate and the family's genealogical records have also been made available to me by the family. I would also like to thank Nicholas B. Wainwright, Director of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, whose family owns the property built by Cresson in 1824. He has written on the history of this estate, "Gwynedd Hall," *Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County*, XI (1957), 3-24.

⁴ *Pierre Cresson, French Huguenot, 1609-1684* (Philadelphia, n.d.). The most complete account of the Cresson family appears in F. W. Leach, "Old Philadelphia Families," *The North American* (Philadelphia), Nov. 10, 1912. On marriage ties among Quaker families, see Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House* (New York, 1963), 119-120.

⁵ Ezra Townsend Cresson and Charles Caleb Cresson, *Diary of Caleb Cresson, 1791-1792* (Philadelphia, 1877).

⁶ Warder's movements may be traced through the Quaker Meeting records. On Jan. 31, 1815, he was "received on certificate" at the Darby Monthly Meeting. On May 27, 1817, he was granted a certificate to the Chester Monthly Meeting. On Mar. 21, 1819, he was granted

years later, he married Elizabeth Townsend of Bensalem and affirmed at the Byberry Monthly Meeting that "he took the said Elizabeth Townsend to be his wife, promising with divine assistance to be unto her an affectionate and faithful husband until death should separate them."⁷ In 1824, a father of two children, Emma



Warder Cresson

and John Elliot, he purchased forty-nine acres at Gwynedd and soon his new three-story residence, barns, and other outbuildings

a certificate to the Bybury (Byberry) Monthly Meeting. The Darby Monthly Meeting was eventually a Hicksite stronghold and it may be that Warder Cresson first heard attacks on Quaker Orthodoxy when attending meetings with his Darby relatives. Darby Monthly Meeting (Hicksite), IV, 144; Chester Monthly Meeting, V, 351, and II, 21. References to Cresson may be seen in the Card Index to American Quaker Genealogy, abstracted and compiled by William Wade Hinshaw, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, Pa.

⁷ Byberry Monthly Meeting, List of Marriages (1811-1886), 27.

became the center of a successful farming enterprise.⁸ In 1829, Cresson purchased ten more acres and was by then a familiar figure at the Monthly Meetings of Gwynedd and nearby Abington. But now, a novel characteristic appeared. Besides dispensing information on crops, he began to argue forcefully about religious beliefs with fellow Quakers.⁹

The second quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of intense political and social ferment. In Europe, it was the time of Romantic reaction to the ideas of the Enlightenment, of re-emphasis on religion, manifesting itself in strict neocatholicism, conversions of such men as John Henry Newman and Friedrich von Schlegel, and the mysticism of Baroness de Krüdener. Even in far away Russia there was a growth of Bible societies. In America, the Age of Jackson showed the effects of sectionalism and economic change on all institutions, and there were also challenges to traditional church authority. The Unitarian movement brought about a split within the Congregational Church. The Methodists argued for a worship without bishops. Frontier evangelism was recruiting converts to such groups as the Shakers. Seldom in American history did religious excitement reach such a peak. Among the Quakers there were also stirrings of dissent. Influenced by Wesleyan evangelism, Friends on both sides of the Atlantic attacked orthodoxy with a strong reaffirmation of belief in Christ as a personal Savior and in Scripture as a final authority. In 1806, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting reflected these trends when it affirmed that one of the reasons for disownment of members was a denial of "the divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit or the authenticity of the Scriptures."¹⁰ However, this "new orthodoxy" was also soon under fire. In 1827, the Quaker society was rent into conflicting camps by those who emphasized the "inner light" and who insisted that the Scriptures should be

⁸ Byberry Monthly Minutes, Oct. 26, 1824, contain the following recommendation sent to the Gwynedd Monthly Meeting: "Warder Cresson having resided within the limits of your meeting for some time past, a certificate was requested for him, Elizabeth his wife and their two minor children, Emma and John Elliot, to be joined in membership with you. On inquiry it appears his temporal affairs are so settled as to grant his request. We therefore recommend them to your religious care and oversight and remain your friends."

⁹ Wainwright, 6 ff.

¹⁰ Margaret H. Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels* (New York, 1969), 85 ff.

studied, rather than being an end in themselves. Elias Hicks of Long Island became the spokesman for the new movement, and the Hicksite, or Great Separation, showed that "the Society of Friends was fast becoming a society of enemies."¹¹ This religious quarrel drew lines between homes, schools, and even cemetery plots.

The controversy was accompanied by attacks on wealth and privilege as well. Pamphlets appeared that recalled William Penn's injunction to his followers to keep their garments "plain and simple." References were made to the "oppressed poor," and to "pseudo-Quakers," who persecuted others because of religious differences. The well-to-do Quakers were described as those "who regularly import the newest fashionable patterns of coats, vests, and pantaloons," and whose children "take lessons in dancing, fencing and boxing schools."¹²

In 1827, Warder Cresson was ready to join in this attack on privilege. In his first religious tract, entitled *An Humble and Affectionate Address to the Select Members of the Abington Quarterly Meeting*, he displayed a mind steeped in Scriptures as well as in the social issues of the day. The tone of the pamphlet was far from "humble" and "affectionate." "I was called of the Lord," he wrote confidently, "to visit the select meeting of Ministers and Elders belonging to Abington Quarterly Meeting . . . to declare unto those that were there gathered, the difference between the righteousness of the letter, or law, and the righteousness of the Gospel." His opposition to the Pharisaic tradition, which he interpreted as adhering to the external aspect of religion, is evident throughout this work. "External things," he insisted, "cannot reach unto the internal nature of . . . [the] soul." He criticized religious leaders who based

¹¹ B. Forbush, *Elias Hicks: Quaker Liberal* (New York, 1956), 252 *passim*; R. W. Doherty, "The Growth of Orthodoxy," *Quaker History*, LIV (1956), 24-34. It is interesting to speculate to what extent Cresson was influenced by the ideas of the Swedenborgians. A branch of this society was established in Philadelphia in 1816. It called itself The American Society for the Dissemination of the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church and had fifty-five members who met in a temple in center city. R. Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church in England, America etc . . .* (London, 1861). That Cresson's beliefs were part of a much wider mystical trend spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may be seen in the interesting article by M. L. Danilewicz, "The King of the New Israel: Thaddeus Grabianka, 1740-1807," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* (1968) 51-73.

¹² Arthur Donaldson, *Matters of Fact Relative to Late Occurrences among the Professional Quakers* (Philadelphia, 1827), 21 ff.

their teachings on an "outward form, order or discipline," attempting "to make an inward man as they would lay out a barn." His tone became increasingly hortatory: "Come out of Babylon, my people, come out of Babylon, and partake not of her iniquities, lest ye also be partakers of her plagues."¹³

Cresson's growing estrangement from the Quaker community and the dissension within the Society are clearly revealed in the records of the Monthly Meetings of Gwynedd and Abington. Although the elders maintained, in keeping with the traditional formulae used at meetings, that "a good degree of love and unity appears to be maintained amongst friends generally," the minutes indicate the opposite. On January 29, 1829, the Gwynedd record shows that "Warder Cresson has for a long time declined the attendance of our religious meetings and has recently joined himself in membership with another religious society, commonly known by the name of Shakers." Cresson admitted this and the case was referred to the Monthly Meeting, with a committee appointed to make a full report. Members of this group met with Cresson, reported that he received them "kindly," but noted that they were unable to persuade him to return. On May 28, 1829, Warder Cresson and a number of others were informed that "essays of testimonies of denial against them" were approved by the Meeting and they were given the right to appeal. Warder Cresson's name does not appear in a census of Friends of December 31, 1829, and on January 28, 1830, the Committee appointed to deal with his case reported that "upon due consideration of his relations and his views and of various matters connected with the subject [they] are united in believing that it would be best to discontinue the case for the present." Possibly the Gwynedd Monthly Meeting elders did not wish to publicize Cresson's defection.¹⁴

¹³ Warder Cresson, *An Humble and Affectionate Address to the Select Members of the Abington Quarterly Meeting* (Philadelphia, 1827), 1-5; Arthur Donaldson, *To the Uninformed* (Philadelphia, 1810). The minutes of the Abington Friends (Abington Monthly Meeting Minutes, Jan. 29, 1827) refer to "our beloved friend, Elias Hicks." Six months later, the minutes of the Abington meeting showed how widespread the separation was in the Philadelphia area: "Friends travelling in the ministry . . . were interrupted in their labors [and] unjustly charged with preaching infidel doctrines denying the divinity of Christ and undervaluing the Scriptures." *Ibid.*, June 25, 1827.

¹⁴ Gwynedd Preparative Meeting, Men's Minutes, Jan. 20, 1829, 79, and Mar. 24, 1829, 81-82; Gwynedd Monthly Meeting Minutes, Jan. 29, 1829, 47, and May 28, 1829, 54-56; Gwynedd and Plymouth Monthly Meeting Minutes, Apr. 30, 1829, 324, May 20, 1829, 325,

During this investigation in October, 1829, Cresson wrote a much stronger attack on the "Babylon" of the Pennsylvania Quakerdom. Published in 1830 under the title of *Babylon the Great is Falling! The Morning Star or Light from on High, Written in Defence of the Rights of the Poor and Oppressed*,¹⁵ it was primarily an attack on wealth and social distinction, written in terms that a religious community could readily grasp, the language of prophetic and eschatological allusions. "It will certainly be admitted," he began, "that all the misery and troubles that afflict the human family arise and spring from . . . selfishness." Love of material object, feelings of social superiority, these Cresson considered as "evils" afflicting mankind, corrupting both religious and secular institutions. The lack of a true religion, he wrote, a faith that ought to be expressed through self-denial and universal love, had brought about tyrannies and caused slavery and bloodshed. He attacked the monopolizing of wealth, "both by speculative and anti-republican measures . . . by bank charters, acts of incorporation . . . lotteries, licensing thousands of unnecessary taverns [and] by the endowment of colleges and seminaries that prepared thousands . . . of 'locusts' to eat up every 'green thing in the land,' " taking money from "the industrious and the laborious." "Wealth was power," he aphorized, and the few who were wealthy also had access to education, which in turn gave them even greater power over "the industrious farmer, mechanic and labourer," giving lie to the principle that "all men are free and

Dec. 31, 1829, 336, and Jan. 28, 1830, 346. It appears from the Gwynedd minutes that Cresson's wife was also "investigated" but the listing of her name on the census at the end of 1829 indicates that she was "cleared." The minutes of the meetings from 1830-1832 suggest growing tensions among the members. "Our religious meetings for some time past, having been frequented by certain persons not in unity with Friends and who, by persisting in their attendance . . . have occasioned some unsettlement and disturbance, it was thought best to appoint a committee to superintend the gathering of our meeting and endeavor by mild and gentle means to prevent the entrance of such persons." Byberry Monthly Meeting, Men's Minutes, 1831-1863, May 29, 1832.

¹⁵ Warder Cresson, *Babylon the Great is Falling . . . Written in Defence of the Rights of the Poor and Oppressed* (Philadelphia, 1830), 3 *passim*. Cresson's references to Elias Hicks indicate his opposition to that reformer. In a broadside published in 1832, Cresson attacked the principles of Hicksite belief: *Jesus Christ Crucified Afresh, and Put to Open Shame by the Hickites [sic]*. A. S. Rosenbach, "An American Jewish Bibliography," *Publications of the American-Jewish Historical Society*, No. 30 (1926), 278.

equal." He denounced the republican form of government in the United States as a "set of selfish laws and selfish appointments in the hands of . . . legislators and self-seeking officials." The United States, "our once happy republic, the glory of the world, must fall as all other republics have done . . . unless they come out of all selfishness and equalize wealth and education." He attacked the cheapening of currency and connected this with trends in Europe that resulted in revolution and oppression. He wrote feelingly of the "sighings of the widow and the crying of the orphan, [of] the frozen and starved dead in alleys and hovels . . . of Philadelphia . . . while balls and parties were advertised in almost every newspaper [and] while horses and carriages were rattling through the streets with priests and professors in them." Addressing himself to "lovers of mankind" and to the "poor and oppressed," he urged them to turn their backs on the materialism around them. Referring to reformer Robert Owen's plans, he stated: "Withdraw yourselves . . . into social communities, governed by sound and perfect principles . . . having equal rights and privileges [and] thus you can reap the good of your own labour." He considered the conditions of the working and farming classes intolerable, with wages barely on subsistence level and unemployment widespread. "The rich are really dependent on you," he counseled the poor, "not you on them." He compared the laboring classes to "bone and sinew [and] the gentry, to the heavy, dull loggy flesh—take away the bone and sinew and you will soon see what the flesh is worth." He dwelt on the evils of the "old world" and their appearance in the "new." "O! United States of America, will thou suffer now [in] the days of thy infamy, such blasphemy to be published and carried within thy borders . . .? Or think ye that the sons of America will not feel . . . the galling chain of injustice, slavery and oppression, more than any nation or any people ever hath done?"

He singled out his fellow Quakers for failure to see these wrongs. Originally, they were the "living witnesses for God and the true light," but they lapsed in their faith and "went to building and erecting another Babel on the ruins of the old." He saw little difference between the priest and the Quaker. "The Quaker," he wrote, "is a hireling for praise and pre-eminence and the priest, a hireling for money." He inveighed against both the Hicksite and Orthodox

factions for stating that: "Christ does not require us to give up our wealth and property outwardly; it is only to be done in mind and in spirit." Quaker family ties, so often connected with business relations, were especially repugnant to him. Time and time again, he censured those who measured the nearness of kinship by the amount of property. This was to him "the very cause of all selfishness and partiality." It was clear that Cresson's separation from the faith of his fathers was almost complete. "O! What a beautiful thing it is for a man to stand quite upright," he exulted.

Babylon the Great is Falling abounded in scriptural and metaphysical references. Passages from the Book of Daniel and discussions of the Hicksite and Shaker beliefs attested to Cresson's thorough immersion in the religious currents of his day. More significantly, the work was also filled with many observations of social movements of that period. Thus, he wrote at length about Frances Wright, whose ideas on the emancipation of women and Negroes (she had established with Robert Dale Owen, the son of Robert Owen, a communal settlement for whites and blacks) were known by few and approved of by even less. Most of Cresson's comments on Frances Wright were sympathetic. "I cannot but help thinking her honest," he wrote, "and particularly when considering the many sacrifices she has made of time, talent and money. . . . Her observations and views of existing evils . . . I do not hesitate to declare as truth." Yet, he was a little uncomfortable with the ideas of the radical reformers. Their mechanistic explanation of the physical world, their espousal of freer sexual mores, their tendency toward deism, if not atheism, made him restrained in his endorsement. He blamed their extreme attitudes on the hypocrisy of those "who pretend and profess a belief much further and higher and do not correct the evils in this life."

In 1833, three years after the publication of this work, Cresson decided to return to his parental home at Byberry. In addition to Emma and John Elliott, his children now included a son Jacob, born in 1828, and another daughter, Eliza, born in January, 1833 (died in May 1835). Whatever Cresson's beliefs were at this time (he had participated in the services of the Shakers in New Lebanon, New York, in the early 1830's), it was clear to him that his wife was determined to bring up his children as members of the Society of

Friends.¹⁶ Cresson, who had written that "fleshly love" was proof of the selfishness of human beings, would soon prove that he would not allow even family attachments to stand between him and his vision of a "city on a hill."

*"Nay, and turn Hebrew? But why not?
If backward still the inquirer goes
To get behind man's present lot
Of crumbling faith; for rear-wall shows
Far behind Rome and Luther—what?
The crag of Sinai . . ."*¹⁷

Warder Cresson's departure from Gwynedd in 1833 marked another step in his separation from the faith of his fathers. Obviously burdened with domestic responsibilities, by 1840 he had become the father of three more children, Clement, Ezra Townsend, and Annabella. There is no record of his publications in the next six years. It was during this period that he became acquainted with a Philadelphia Jewish leader, Isaac Leeser, in whose religion Cresson was to find a confirmation of his own beliefs.

Leeser, the minister of Congregation Mikveh Israel since 1829, was using his pulpit and pen to educate the membership and to revive the languishing communal and religious organizations. In his first important work, *The Jews and the Mosaic Law*, published in 1833, he not only expounded on basic Jewish beliefs for both Jewish and Christian readers, but also reiterated his belief in the "ultimate restoration of the Israelites and the gathering of the captives." He noted that those countries which persecuted or excluded the Jews, Spain in particular, were impoverished. England, on the other hand, had risen to eminence since Cromwell admitted the Jews. Leeser, however, did not expect an imminent fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies and wrote that the Jews "should await with resignation the time when Jerusalem shall be rebuilt and the Israelites shall again inhabit the land of their ancestors."¹⁸

¹⁶ A daughter Mary, born in October, 1826, died the following January. Gwynedd Monthly Meeting Papers, Sept. 27, 1832, 146-147; also Frankford Monthly Meeting Papers, Jan. 1, 1833, 30-32. Cresson's oldest son, John Elliot, was eventually "disowned" for joining the Hicksites. *Ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1846, 344.

¹⁷ Bezanson, 63.

¹⁸ Isaac Leeser, *The Jews and the Mosaic Law* (Philadelphia, 1834), 155-156. For Leeser's life, see M. Sellers, "Isaac Leeser, Architect of the American Jewish Community" (unpub-

In his *Discourses*, published in 1836, Leeser continued to stress the "ingathering," that "auspicious period when universal peace should prevail and Israel be again in the land of Palestine." The pages of this work were filled with statements on messianic redemption, a time "when the Israelites will be assembled from all the countries where they are now scattered."¹⁹

Leeser came to prominence as a national Jewish leader in 1840. In that year, the Jews of Damascus were accused of a ritual murder, several of them dying after being subjected to torture by the local authorities. The incident sent a wave of revulsion throughout the western world, with such outstanding Jewish leaders as Adolphe Crémieux of France and Moses Montefiore of England leading the protest. Leeser led the reaction in Philadelphia and invited Christian ministers to speak from his pulpit. It was noteworthy that the State Department, in response to the events in Damascus, sent a protest to the Turkish authorities, the first such representation by the American government on behalf of Jews who were not its citizens.²⁰

Palestine and the Near East were acquiring an ever increasing significance in the early 1840's among those who believed in the literalness of the Old Testament prophecies. Mystics on both sides of the Atlantic discussed the gathering of the Ten Lost Tribes, and established utopian communities. The decline of the Ottoman Empire was frequently mentioned as an indication of the imminent freeing of Palestine. There was increasing interest in the work of the Christian missions and the pages of the press were filled with reminders of the former glories of the Holy Land. In America, the followers of William Miller, founder of the Adventist church in up-state New York, believed, on the basis of elaborate calculations of dates, in the coming end of the world and a return to Jerusalem.

lished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1965), 13 ff. and 166 ff. For a comprehensive account of Leeser's influence on the Philadelphia Jewish community, see Maxwell Whiteman, "Isaac Leeser and the Jews of Philadelphia," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XVIII (1959) 207-244.

¹⁹ Isaac Leeser, *Discourse . . . on the Subject of the Jewish Religion* (Philadelphia, 1836), I, 27 ff., 181 ff., 251 ff., II, 13 ff., 183-268; R. Mahler, "American Jewry and the Idea of the Return to Zion in the period of the American Revolution," *Zion*, XV (1950), 106-143 (in Hebrew).

²⁰ Cyrus Adler, "Jews in the Diplomatic Service of the United States," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XV (1906), 4-6.

Another contemporary, whose views very likely influenced Cresson, was Mordecai M. Noah, an outstanding American Jew who addressed Christian and Jewish audiences in New York and Philadelphia in the early 1840's and urged a return to Zion as the only solution to the Jewish problem. Playwright and journalist, he had served as the American Consul in Tunis in 1813. In 1825, he attempted to establish "Ararat," a city of refuge for the Jews on Grand Island in the Niagara River. In 1844, in a discourse on the *Restoration of the Jews*, addressed primarily to Christian audiences, Noah forcefully expressed the religious and political ideas of millenium-minded reformers.²¹ "Within a few years," he said, "the attention of the world has been directed, in a peculiar manner, to the character, condition and future prospects of the Jewish people. Ministers of the Gospel, in more closely examining the predictions of the prophets and the miraculous preservation of the chosen people, have been struck with the injustice and oppression they have met with for the last 1800 years." He acknowledged his own belief in the "restoration of the Jews and the coming of the Messiah," and confidently noted that political happenings in Syria, Egypt, Turkey and Russia indicated the coming of upheavals that might bring about the return of Jews to Jerusalem. "Within the last twenty-five years," he insisted, "great revolutions have occurred in the East . . . marking the gradual advancement of the Christian power." England and France, he noted, had scored advances against India and North Africa. "Russia with a steady glance and firm step, approaches Turkey in Europe and, when her railroads are completed to the Black Sea, will pour in her cossacks . . . and Constantinople will be occupied . . . [then] Russia . . . with one arm on the Mediterranean and the other on the North Sea, will nearly embrace all Europe." That, however, would not be the end of the revolution. Because England must possess Egypt and secure her route to India, Palestine

²¹ M. M. Noah, *Discourse on the Restoration of the Jews* (New York, 1845), iii *passim*. Noah cited a letter he had received from John Adams in which the former President wrote: "I really wish the Jews again in Judaea, an independent nation. . . ." *Ibid.*, vi-vii. A reviewer in Leiser's *Occident*, commenting on Noah's *Discourse*, considered his plan for a Jewish state "impracticable," since such a state could not defend itself against intervention by big powers. Noah was also criticized for addressing himself to a Christian audience. *Occident*, II (1845), 600-606. The only full-length biography of Noah is by Isaac Goldberg, *Major Noah* (New York, 1937).

would of necessity stand as a buffer between Russia and Egypt. With the Holy Land reverting to its legitimate proprietors, "the ports of the Mediterranean will again be opened to the busy hum of commerce . . . and Christian and Jew will together, on Mount Zion, raise their voices in praise. . . ."

Turning to practical aspects of Zionism, Noah insisted that Jews could succeed in agriculture and that the climate and soil of Palestine were suitable for large-scale colonization. He appealed to his audiences as Christians and as Americans: "You believe in the Second Coming of Jesus . . . [but] that, Christians, depends on you. It cannot come to pass . . . until the Jews are restored . . . in their unconverted state. If he is again to appear, it must be to his own people."²² The United States, Noah continued, was the most logical country from which to launch this effort. The eighteenth chapter of Isaiah described a "land, shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia." This land, according to Noah, that will send its ambassadors by sea, was the United States. He concluded his oration on a most dramatic note. The prophet Ezekiel, he asserted, had described the great war against Gog. This was Russia, a power which in her attempt to seize India from England and Turkey from the Ottoman Empire "will make the Holy Land the theater of a terrible conflict [and] then will ensue the battle so sublimely described by the prophet: the fire and hailstones . . . the advent of the Messiah and the thousand years of happiness and peace." These ideas resembled closely those of Thaddeus Grabianka, a Polish mystic who, earlier in the century, had associated with the *Illuminati* of Avignon and had predicted the imminent end of the Russian Empire, the expulsion of Turks from Europe, union of all churches and his own enthronement as King of the New Israel in Jerusalem.²³

It is likely that Warder Cresson heard Noah's addresses and certainly read reports of his activities. The periodical *Occident*, first published by Leese in 1843, carried news of Noah's activities. Cresson's own writings and ideas during the past ten years had

²² In the seventeenth century, another visionary, Rabbi Menassah ben Israel, approached Cromwell with a plea for readmitting Jews to England. He argued that a dispersal of the Jews would signal the coming Millenium. If England allowed the Jews to settle, she would hasten the day!

²³ Danilewicz, 69.

drawn him closer to a literal interpretation of the Bible, and by 1844 he was ready to take another crucial step. In the same year that Noah made his series of addresses on the restoration of Jews to Palestine, Cresson decided to go to Washington and to apply for the position of the first American Consul to Jerusalem.

The meager record shows that two influential Philadelphians, Dr. I.A. Birkey and Congressman E. Joy Morris, later American minister to Turkey, recommended Cresson for the job. Morris, recently returned from a trip to the Near East, noted in a letter to Secretary of State John C. Calhoun on May 1, 1844, that "Jerusalem is now much frequented by Americans." On May 17, Cresson, who had volunteered to work without compensation, was officially notified of his appointment.²⁴

It was one of the shortest assignments on record. On May 25, 1844, barely a week after Cresson received his commission, Samuel D. Ingham of New Hope, Pennsylvania, and formerly Jackson's Secretary of the Treasury, wrote to Calhoun: "The papers have recently announced the appointment of Warder Cresson, Consul to Jerusalem. This man is the brother of Elliot Cresson who is much distinguished for his activity in the cause of colonization, but the Consul has been laboring under an aberration of mind for many years; his mania is of the religious species. He was born a Quaker, wanted to be a preacher . . . and has gone round the compass from one job to another, sometimes preaching about the church doors and in the streets; his passion is for religious controversy and no doubt he expects to convert Jews and Mohammedans in the East—but, in truth, he is withal a very weak-minded man and his mind, what there is of it, quite out of order. . . . His appointment is made a theme of ridicule by all who know him. . . ."²⁵

As a consequence, on June 22, 1844, Calhoun wrote Cresson: "I am instructed by the President to inform you, that, having reconsidered the proposal to establish a Consulate at Jerusalem, he is of the opinion it is not called for by public service, and therefore declines to establish it at present."²⁶

²⁴ Karp, 2-3.

²⁵ Ingham to Calhoun, May 25, 1844, Applications and Recommendations, 1836-1844, National Archives.

²⁶ Calhoun to Cresson, June 22, 1844, Domestic Letters, Department of State, XXXIV, 255, National Archives.

By this time, Cresson, unaware that his commission had been revoked, was well on his way to Jerusalem, carrying with him a dove and an American flag. His brief stay in England in the summer of 1844 was marked by the appearance of three of his publications, *The Good Olive Tree, Israel, The Two Witnesses—Moses and Elijah*, and *Jerusalem, the Centre and Joy of the Whole Earth*.²⁷ In the latter work, Cresson expounded most fully on the Zionist theme, in terms similar to those used by Mordecai M. Noah. He began by observing that "signs of the times announce extraordinary events about to take place in regard to the Jews. . . . It is evidently the Day of Preparation." Among the "signs" that he noted were: the decline of the Ottoman power "and the universal acknowledgement of all the best chronologists, that the time allotted that empire is about closing"; the building of a hospital and school at Jerusalem by Sir Moses Montefiore, a wise provision, according to Cresson, since "the Jews, on their return will not be acclimated"; and the establishment by Queen Victoria and King Frederick William IV of Prussia of an Episcopal Church on Mount Zion, where Michael Solomon Alexander, a converted Jew of the "tribe of Judah," had been appointed as Bishop.²⁸ Other signs mentioned by Cresson included the oppression by the Emperor of Russia, pharaohlike, of "thousands and tens of thousands of Jews in his dominions"; the appointment of consuls to Jerusalem by Britain, Prussia, France, Russia and Austria, proving the growing importance of Jerusalem; the appearance of the "signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars falling . . . in Europe and America"; and the rejection by many Jews of the

²⁷ Warder Cresson, *The Good Olive Tree, Israel* . . . (London, 1844), *The Two Witnesses—Moses and Elijah* (London, 1844), and *Jerusalem, The Centre and Joy of the Whole Earth* (London, 1844). In addition to these works, Cresson undertook the publication of a periodical called *Day-Break*. This quarterly was to "convey to the reader the fullest information" on such diverse subjects as the position of the Ottoman power in relationship to the coming of the Messiah, the economic condition of Jews in Palestine, including a guide to taxes and expenses there. The title of the periodical was an example of Cresson's preoccupation with events in the Ottoman Empire: "The day breaks from the East, the eastern horizon is lighting up all around us." *The Good Olive Tree, Israel*, 20. The English reviewers called him "an extraordinary man of a highly enthusiastic temperament," and described his post as Consul to Jerusalem as a "matter of curious interest and possibly of high importance." *The Voice of Jacob*, III (Sept. 6, 1844), 223.

²⁸ *Jerusalem, the Centre and Joy of the Whole Earth*, 1 *passim*. Cresson expected large numbers of Russian Jews to make their way to Palestine, and he appealed for funds for those who had already fled the territories of Nicholas I. *Ibid.*, 145.

JERUSALEM
THE
CENTRE AND JOY OF THE WHOLE EARTH,
AND THE
JEW THE RECIPIENT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

BY WARDER CRESSON,

UNITED STATES CONSUL AT JERUSALEM.

"ALL ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, SEE YE, when
he lifteth up an ENSIGN on the Mountains; and when he bloweth a TRUMPET,
HEAR YE." *Isa. xviii. 3.*

"For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her (Jerusalem) a *Wall of Fire* round
about, and will be the GLORY in the midst of her." *Zech. ii. 5.*

Second Edition.

LONDON:
J. NISBET AND CO., BERNERS STREET;
B. WERTHEIM, ALDINE CHAMBERS,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

M. DCCC. XLIV.

"authority of the Talmud . . . and their determination to be guided solely by the word of God and his Prophets." Finally, Cresson referred to the eighteenth chapter of Isaiah, using arguments like those advanced by Noah in his speeches in Philadelphia and New York. He recalled a conversation with "a learned Jew" who informed him that Isaiah's reference to "the land overshadowing with wings" was an allusion to North and South America (because of the shape of those two continents), and that the passage about ambassadors sent by sea in vessels made of rushes actually meant "rushing vessels," the kind of steamboats used by the United States, a country which was then applying steam to navigation.²⁹

As to his own decision to go to Jerusalem, Cresson emphasized his conviction that only one's physical presence in the Holy Land could bring about the realization of these prophecies. "If I could have honestly believed . . . that the fullest degree of the glory of the coming kingdom might have been possessed . . . without any connection with *place*, I might have still remained at home in my ceiled house, with a beloved and virtuous wife and lovely family. Great and precious were the many privileges that I enjoyed there, and I feel most sensibly the deprivation of them; but the light and conviction of God's precious promises, in reference to the return of the Jew and the setting up his everlasting kingdom at Mount Zion and Jerusalem, became so great . . . that I could no longer remain at home; therefore I have forsaken houses, brethren, sisters, mother, wife, children and lands for the kingdom of God's sake." He insisted that his only motive in applying for the post as Consul was to give of his time, labor, and money to Israel "now despised," but which will soon be a "Crown of Glory . . . and a Royal Diadem in the hand of thy God."³⁰

Cresson left England in the middle of August, 1844, fully expecting the Temple Sanctuary to be cleansed and the prophetic promises to be fulfilled within a few years. In his own words, "when I reached Jerusalem in 1844, the missionaries of the Church of England and those of the American Presbyterian Church had quarreled and left Jerusalem . . . and left the American mission establishment entirely

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5. The identification of "the land overshadowing with wings" with the United States was found in both Jewish and Christian writings. *Jewish Chronicle*, II (1854) 4. This was published by the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews.

³⁰ *Jerusalem, The Centre and Joy of the Whole Earth*, 125-126.

empty, which I occupied.”³¹ Cresson, who always criticized bitterly the work of societies devoted to converting Jews, now began a more concentrated attack on them. In one of his rare excursions into the field of satire, he wrote a short tract *The Society Formed In England and America for Promoting Sawdust, Instead of Good Old Cheese, Amongst the Jews in Jerusalem*. Identifying Judaism with the “Good Old Cheese,” Cresson observed that when the *Real Article* became too costly and brought *disabilities* to its users, a Society was established with a mission to introduce Sawdust. Since the “Good Old Cheese itself smelled too strong and tasted too oily and greasy. . . [and] Sawdust looked in every respect very much like the grated article (and this imitation has doubtless been very *Grating* to the Jews . . .),” a decision was made to create societies in England, Scotland and America to promote sawdust among the “poor Jews,” even though it was admitted that they were the possessors of the genuine article. Cresson wrote disparagingly of the high salaries paid the missionaries who lived “in the very best houses, bought . . . most splendid Arabian horses and dressed . . . in the most luxurious and stylish manner.” As for their practical work, he wrote that “To further their imposing and enterprising object . . . they built [a church] which has cost them more than \$150,000; then . . . a hospital and Dispensary, sent physicians from England, set up an institution of Industry and also a college and schools, all to entrap and instruct the poor, dirty, oily, greasy, starving Jews and to tempt and provide them with good livings, fine English clothing, honorable titles of Reverend . . . upon the only one condition that they will give their names and use all their influence . . . to support and promote the interest of their Society for introducing and establishing Sawdust instead of Good Old Cheese, amongst the poor Jews in Jerusalem and Palestine.” With all this effort, Cresson insisted, they failed to get a single Jew, born in Jerusalem, to apostatize.³²

During Cresson’s four-year stay in Jerusalem, he continued his attack on the missionaries, blaming them for exploiting the miseries of the local Jewish population in order to win converts. He corre-

³¹ *The Key of David*, 201, and Appendix D, 321–322.

³² Cresson complained about the arguments among the various missions and their wasteful expenditure of funds. *Ibid.*, 321–322. For other activities of the Jerusalem missions, see *Occident*, II (1844), 255 ff.

sponded with Isaac Leeser, and the pages of the *Occident* reflected his concern for the poor of Jerusalem and his anger at those who "holding the Bible in their hands . . . professing to follow a Savior that 'had not where to lay his head'," used charity for proselytism.³³

Cresson's description of the poverty and desolation in Jerusalem has been verified by numerous contemporaries who visited there. William Makepeace Thackeray, sketching and satirizing his way through the Near East in October, 1844, has painted a vivid, if unsympathetic, picture of Cresson and the Jews of Palestine. On his first encounter with Cresson, the English author was on his way from Jaffa to Jerusalem when a party of armed horsemen appeared, led by an Arab rider with two janissaries holding silver maces escorting "the new American Consul-General of Syria and Jerusalem, hastening to that city, with the inferior consuls of Ramleh and Jaffa to escort him. He expects to see the Millenium in three years, and has accepted the office of consul at Jerusalem, so as to be on the spot in readiness." Thackeray then recounted how his Arab attendant galloped in and out around Cresson's company, "in a play of war," and how the American Arab (Cresson's attendant) "replied in a similar playful ferocity," staging a tournament on the plains of Jaffa. Cresson invited Thackeray and his company to have breakfast at the house of his subaltern, a "hospitable one-eyed Armenian, who represents the United States in Jaffa." They entered the house over which the stars and stripes were flying and there they were served "rice soup in pishpash, flavored with cinnamon and spice . . . boiled mutton . . . fowls swimming in grease . . . brown ragouts belaboured with onions [and] . . . a smoking pilaff of rice."³⁴

Thackeray next described a religious service he attended in Jerusalem at the Episcopal Church where Dr. Alexander preached,

³³ *Ibid.*, VI (1848), 456-460. Cresson complimented the English Society of Friends for their project to assist "poor Israelites on their way to Jerusalem." *Ibid.*, VI (1849), 599-601. Cresson was now signing his articles as Michael Boaz Israel, or as "The Watchman." Salo W. Baron and J. M. Baron, "Palestinian Messengers in America, 1849-1879: A Record of Four Journeys," *Jewish Social Studies*, V (1943), 115-162, 225-292. The Barons erroneously assumed that "The Watchman" referred to a publication by that name when they quoted Cresson's statement on the English Society of Friends. *Ibid.*, 124. Their lengthy study does not mention Cresson's activities.

³⁴ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Irish Sketch-book: and Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (London, 1869), 452-453, 463, 472-473 *passim*. That there was great suffering among the poor of Jerusalem is evident from Cresson's own appeals. *Occident*, III (1845) 167-168.

and where Cresson apparently worshipped on occasion. "Here we all assembled on the Sunday after our arrival," wrote Thackeray. "Even that stout anti-prelatist, the American Consul, who has left his house and fortune in America in order to witness the coming of the Millenium, who believes it so near that he has brought a dove with him from his native land (which bird he solemnly informed us was to survive the expected Advent), was affected by the good old words and service. He swayed about and moaned in his place at various passages; during the sermon he gave especial marks of sympathy and approbation."

Thackeray was obviously amused by Cresson. He described him as a "tradesman, who had made a considerable fortune, and lived at a country-house in comfortable retirement," coming finally to "Syria" to witness the return of the Jews "and the glorification of the restored Jerusalem." As soon as Cresson arrived, Thackeray wrote, "he sent and demanded an interview with the Pasha [and] explained to him his interpretation of the Apocalypse, in which he had discovered that the Five Powers and America are about to intervene in Syrian affairs, and the infallible return of the Jews to Palestine. The news must have astonished the Lieutenant of the Sublime Porte; and since the days of the Kingdom of Münster, under his Anabaptist Majesty, John of Leyden, I doubt whether any government has received or appointed so queer an ambassador. The kind, worthy, simple man took me to his temporary consulate-house of the American Missionary Establishment and under pretence of treating me to white wine, expounded his ideas; talked of futurity as he would about an article in *The Times*; and he had no more doubt of seeing a divine kingdom established in Jerusalem than you that there will be a levee next spring at St. James'."

Thackeray described the "Ghetto of Jerusalem" as a place "pre-eminent" in filth, with the inhabitants gathered around the "dung-gate," wailing and lamenting for "the lost glories of their city." He readily admitted, however, that the English missionaries had been unsuccessful in converting the Jews: "the Episcopal apparatus—the chaplains, and the colleges and the beadles—have succeeded in converting a dozen of them."³⁵

³⁵ Thackeray, 462. The English author found the Christian services distasteful. He described the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as a scene of "flaring candles, reeking incense,

Thackeray was not the only one to write disparagingly about Cresson. On December 6, 1844, Dabney S. Carr, the American Minister-Resident at Constantinople, addressed a letter to J. Chasseaud, the United States Consul at Beirut. Discussing first the hostility of Russian officials toward American missionaries in Syria, Carr suggested that the missionaries would be protected "if need be, by calling the whole of the American squadron in the Mediterranean to Beirut." He then turned to the "mission" of Warder Cresson and noted that he had received no evidence on his appointment as Consul. Carr urged the United States officials in Beirut to have no dealings with him, and, commenting on an official seal that Cresson had used, added: "I have been inclined to think from what I have heard of him that he was some crazy man and the impression from the seal which he furnished the vice-consul at Jaffa and which he sent me has confirmed me in the opinion. Crazy men, however, must be kept in their proper places and I have taken steps to put him in his. . . ." ³⁶

In a second dispatch on December 6, addressed to Warder Cresson, but written in third person, Carr once again attacked the self-styled Consul to Jerusalem. "I received several months ago a note of three or four lines, where written I know not, but dated 5 August 1844, signed 'Warder Cresson, U.S. Consul at Jerusalem,' stating that the writer had been informed in London that his papers and letters had been forwarded to me and desiring me to forward them to . . . Bishop Solomon Alexander at Jerusalem." Carr denied that he had anything to send to Cresson and added that he had just learned that "such a person" was in Jerusalem, "passing himself off there as Consul (some say as Consul-General) of the United States" and giving papers of protection to Jews who were not citizens of the United States even before his arrival at his "pretended"

savage pictures of Scripture story . . . the priests clad in outlandish robes, snuffing and chanting incomprehensible litanies, robing, disrobing, lighting up candles or extinguishing them. . . . The English stranger looks on the scene . . . with a feeling of scorn, bewilderment and shame at that grovelling incredulity, those strange rites and ceremonies, that almost confessed imposture," *Ibid.*, 468-469.

³⁶ Carr to Chasseaud, Dec. 6, 1844, Despatches (Turkey), National Archives. On Nov. 16, 1844, Chasseaud, the American Consul at Beirut, called Carr's attention to Cresson's seal and inquired about the new Consul's authority. Carr to Calhoun, Mar. 5, 1845, *ibid.*

post. Carr added sternly that until Cresson has been officially confirmed by his government and acknowledged by the Turkish authorities by being granted a *Berat* or *Exequator* "he has no right to perform any consular acts." Addressing himself directly to Cresson and informing that henceforth all his acts would be declared null and void, Carr concluded that he would inform the authorities in Washington of what had transpired. "I shall also send to the Secretary of State the impression taken from a seal which you have furnished the Vice-Consul at Jaffa by which I find that you have established a 'legation of the United States.' Therefore I shall, if I hear of your performing any further consular acts . . . ask the Turkish government to order you out of its Dominions."³⁷

The following day, Carr wrote to tell the officials in Washington of what had transpired. After repeating the facts of the case as he had outlined them to Cresson, Carr noted: "From all that I can learn of him he is deranged, and as his conduct is altogether irregular and outrageous and calculated to injure us with this people and bring us into ridicule . . . I have disclaimed to the Porte all knowledge of him. . . ."³⁸

Cresson responded on January 5, 1845, with a carefully worded rebuttal. In a letter addressed to the "Minister of the United States," he insisted that he had been appointed Consul for Jerusalem and Syria. "Last Spring I was confirmed by the Senate, as was published in the *Madisonian* and the *U.S. Gazette*." According to Cresson, he had not received any notice from the State Department that his commission had been withdrawn. He urged Carr to communicate with those legislators who had approved his nomination. As for the granting of papers of protection, Cresson admitted to giving such a document "to an Israelite by the name . . . of Jacob Jehuda," but he added that since the "Israelite" was not expected to come to Jerusalem for five or six months, he (Cresson) expected to be empowered by an *Exequator* from the Turkish government by that time. Cresson denied that he had designated his post as a "legation" or that he had used a special seal for that purpose. "The

³⁷ Carr to Cresson, Dec. 6, 1844, *ibid.* The letter is dated 1845, an obvious error.

³⁸ Carr included with his dispatch a sample of the seal which he claimed Cresson affixed to documents. It bore the legend: "Legation of the United States of America in Jaffa." Carr to Calhoun, Dec. 7, 1844, *ibid.*

appointment as Consul has been of considerable expense to me," he concluded. "It has cost me many a dollar and I did not wish for any salary, as I told the President and our Secretary of State, John C. Calhoun. My object in going to Washington was to get an appointment in order to obtain protection for myself . . . and the poor, oppressed Jews."³⁹

Quite obviously, half a year after a decision was made by his government that no post was to be established at Jerusalem, Cresson continued to act as a representative of the United States. Perhaps he never received official word of the termination of his job. In any case, he quickly plunged into the affairs of the Jewish community in Jerusalem and his correspondence with Mordecai M. Noah shows that, as late as 1847, he was still issuing certificates of "protection." On November 5, 1847, he wrote a rambling letter to Noah in which he connected the war between the United States and Mexico with the restoration of the descendants of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manassah to Mount Zion. He referred once again to America as "The land overshadowed with wings," and argued that the passages from Isaiah proved that the United States rather than England would be the means for the restoration of Jews to their land. He urged the building of a strong navy and expressed the fear that England might use the Mexican War as an excuse to attack American interests. He referred to England as the "little farm," but he contrasted her naval strength with that of America, "a great farm, unfenced and ill-prepared to meet England." Convinced that colonies weakened the mother country, he expected English and French involvements in Asia to weaken those empires. Cresson's attraction to Judaism was more and more apparent. He asked Noah to use the name of Abraham Michael Israel, instead of Cresson, if the letter was to be published.⁴⁰

It was also in 1847 that Cresson began writing his most personal work, *The Key of David; David the True Messiah*, in which his

³⁹ Cresson to Carr, Jan. 5, 1845, *ibid.* Cresson was convinced that a mass exodus of "oppressed Jews" was about to take place. "There were eighty or hundred that came in the English steamer *Iberia* when I came in her, on their way to Jerusalem, and about two hundred have arrived since from Constantinople." *The Voice of Jacob*, IV (July 4, 1845), 185.

⁴⁰ The Cresson letter is in the possession of Maxwell Whiteman of Philadelphia. I am grateful for his permission to make use of this interesting document.

THE KEY OF DAVID.

DAVID THE TRUE MESSIAH,

OR

THE ANOINTED OF THE GOD OF JACOB.

THE

TWO WOMEN

WHO CAME TO

KING SOLOMON

Were designed, in the greatest depth of Wisdom,

TO REPRESENT

THE TRUE AND FALSE CHURCHES, AND THE LIVING
AND DEAD CHILD,

OR

M E S S I A H.

ALSO,

REASONS FOR BECOMING A JEW;

WITH A

REVISION OF THE LATE LAWSUIT FOR LEXACY ON THAT ACCOUNT.

TOGETHER WITH

AN APPENDIX.

BY

WARDER CRESSON.

PHILADELPHIA:
Sold by all the Principal Booksellers.
5612.

gradual and irreversible attachment to Judaism was plain to see. The pages of *The Key of David* were filled with elaborate interpretations of Old Testament stories, especially those relating to King David and his progenitors. Jerusalem had stirred Cresson deeply. Everywhere he found justification for the origins of Judaism. Archaeological diggings convinced him of the existence of Solomon's Temple and the walls of Herod's palace.⁴¹ By the same token, these discoveries made him doubt the authenticity of the New Testament accounts. He was certain that "neither the walls of Jerusalem nor its streets were built at all during the appearance of Jesus but were destroyed seventy years after him by Titus and that the Holy Sepulchre was not the place of Christ's death." These beliefs reinforced his conviction that the prophecies of Daniel remained unfulfilled. Confessing that he had "sucked all these inconsistencies with [his] mother's milk," Cresson now connected his own rebellion with others who challenged orthodoxy. Galileo, Columbus, William Harvey and Robert Fulton had been condemned and scoffed at. Priests had always opposed progress and republicanism, wrote Cresson. He contrasted the divisions within the Christian Church from the fourth to the nineteenth centuries with the unity of Judaism.⁴²

Finally, denying the divinity of Jesus after noting the contradictions in the Gospels, Cresson was ready for the most drastic step of his incredible journey. "I remained in Jerusalem in my former faith until the 28th day of March, 1848," he wrote, "when I became fully satisfied that I could never obtain Strength and Rest, but by doing as Ruth did, and saying to her Mother-in-Law, or Naomi (The Jewish Church), 'Entreat me not to leave thee . . . for whither thou goest I will go'. . . . In short, upon the 28th day of March, 1848, I was circumcised, entered the Holy Covenant and became a Jew. . . ."⁴³ Cresson was then forty-nine years old.

On May 7, 1848, Cresson began his return trip to Philadelphia, "being anxious of once more beholding the faces of those I loved most dearly above anything else on earth." He could not find a ship sailing directly from Jaffa or Beirut and had to wait for a ship at Smyrna, delaying his trip to "beloved family and home," by a

⁴¹ *The Key of David*, 32 *passim*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 92 *passim*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 205.

month.⁴⁴ Cresson felt that he could convince his family to share his newly-found faith. We do not have the letters he wrote home, though it is clear from statements he made after his return that he kept his wife and children informed about his activities and his religious conversion.

*"Alone and at doubt's freezing pole
He wrestled with the pristine forms
like the first man. . . ."*⁴⁵

Six months after his conversion to Judaism, Cresson returned to his native city. Soon after his arrival on September 20, 1848, he plunged with enthusiasm into a campaign to acquaint the public with the possibilities of Jewish settlement in Palestine. His articles in the *Occident*, signed with a new name, Michael Boaz Israel, or "The Watchman," once again attacked the work of Christian missionaries. He accused them of attempts to "convert or 'pervert' the Jews."⁴⁶

But now a case of proselytism closer to home was to be the start of a violent domestic crisis. Cresson's wife, Elizabeth, had become, as he put it, a "rigid Episcopalian" and Cresson, who had fought to prevent conversions of Jews by Episcopalian missions in Palestine, considered her act a personal betrayal. Two months before his own conversion, he wrote a short article to the *Occident*, his language presaging a possible domestic storm. "There is a very great difference between a man's growing up in the midst of the house, or the house growing up in the midst of a man. In the first position, he might enjoy himself, and be very comfortable indeed, surrounded by an affectionate wife and children; but in the last case he would be exceedingly uncomfortable and troubled and require the assistance of the most skilful and eminent physician before he could be disgorge of his great burden, viz. of extracting the house out of him."⁴⁷ Nineteen years earlier, Cresson had written how beautiful

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 337. Cresson noted that the passage from Smyrna to Boston took 45 to 65 days and cost \$50.00.

⁴⁵ Bezanson, 62.

⁴⁶ *Occident*, VI (1848), 457-458, 599-601.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, VI (1849), 498-503, "The Tub, or House Turned Upside Down."

it was for a man to stand upright. Events were about to prove how painful this was.

According to his account in the *The Key of David*⁴⁸ he had returned from Jerusalem anxious to reconcile himself with his family, but found nothing but enmity. He claimed that his wife's conversion was "the one great point upon which first commenced all our . . . difficulties," forcing him to choose between "the one, only God or my wife."⁴⁹ To this were added financial problems. His twenty-year-old son, Jacob, had informed him that the family farm at Byberry was sold to a Joseph Ashton for \$10,640 and that, in addition, \$2,000 worth of his personal effects were disposed of by vendue. Cresson, who had given his wife power of attorney before leaving for Jerusalem, found himself practically propertyless. He remained at his home in downtown Philadelphia until December, 1848, trying to verify the financial arrangements made during his absence and attempting to find the vendue book. One day, as he described it, "when I was sitting upstairs, in the same room with my wife, before a bureau, and had the second drawer from the top, part way out, and lifting up a newspaper that covered the bottom of the drawer, I perceived the vendue book . . . but I had no sooner taken it into my hands than it was immediately snatched from me by her. . . . I ran after her two or three steps with the intention to take it from her, when I thought it might lead to a struggle—I often having declared that it was below the dignity of a good man to lay his hands upon a woman."⁵⁰

Subsequently, Cresson found out that the vendue book had been made out to Elliot Cresson, his eldest brother. He was now convinced that his entire family (except for his oldest son, John Elliot, whom he considered honest) had conspired to rob him. Further investigation in the Recorder's Office revealed a Bond and Mortgage given by a Joseph Ashton to Warder Cresson in the amount of \$5,320 dated July 1, 1848. Soon thereafter, Cresson revoked his wife's power of attorney.

More recriminations followed. Cresson was especially angry at his son-in-law, Alexander F. Porter, Emma's husband, who lived

⁴⁸ *The Key of David*, 203 *passim*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 208 *passim*.

with them. He accused him of being the principal offender who wanted to get hold of the family funds. The situation in the house was becoming intolerable. Cresson, stating that "my wife had been locked up days and nights from me," hired a wagon and took his belongings to the house of a Jewish friend, Isaac Asch. He then assigned one half of the \$5,320 mortgage to his wife and family, in order, as he put it, "to convince them that a Jew could 'do justice and love mercy.'"⁵¹

By now the battle lines were drawn. On May 15, 1849, Cresson's wife Elizabeth and other members of his immediate family, claiming that Cresson wanted to rebuild the Temple on Mount Moriah and was incompetent to handle his business affairs, lodged a charge of lunacy against him. It did not take long for a Sheriff's jury of six men to issue a verdict of insanity.⁵²

It is relatively clear from the available records that Cresson did not spend any time in an asylum. His articles continued to appear in the *Occident* throughout 1849 and he made no reference to confinement in any of his writings.⁵³ The result, instead, was a legal contest. Cresson's attorney, General Horatio Hubbell, succeeded in bringing an appeal and on April 11, 1850, traverse was granted, that is, a denial of an allegation of fact in a previous plea. Preparations were made on both sides for a trial on the charge of lunacy in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, a lawsuit that was to become one of the outstanding cases involving the issues of insanity and freedom of religion.⁵⁴

Two years after the original complaint, on May 13, 1851, the trial opened before Judge Edward King. Elizabeth Cresson's lawyer, David Paul Brown, listed a series of charges designed to show that Cresson was a lunatic and incapable of handling his own affairs. His accusations were numerous: Cresson had joined various sects such as the Shakers, Millerites, Mormons, Irvingites, and Campbellites before departing for Palestine to become a Jew; before every elec-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 207-209. To prove his son-in-law's "malicious feelings," Cresson told how Porter, aware "that pork was contrary to the law of God . . . and therefore disagreeable to me," said to the hired girl in the house, "Susan, go and get another pound of sausage." *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵³ *Occident*, VII (1849), 122-124, 192-196, 324.

⁵⁴ The trial has been called "one of the strangest in legal history." B. W. Korn, *American Jewry in the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1951), 157.

tion he would prophesy a war and he refused to vote, since he thought that no President should rule; he harangued the people in the streets and upon one occasion walked with some friends around a house (it was not clear whose) and, lacking ram's horns, shouted, in an effort to make the walls fall down; he informed Dr. Ramsay, a Presbyterian clergyman, that he saw in Jerusalem the embalmed body of King David; he claimed the Ten Lost Tribes were in Africa and that he had acquired evidence, while in Germany, that the Savior was a Negro; he applied epithets to the Savior and his Mother ("which we cannot here relate"); he took to Jerusalem an American flag and a white dove and insisted, when receiving his commission as Consul at the State Department, that he would now be a "door-keeper in the House of the Lord." It was even alleged that he claimed to have seen angels while he was circumcised in Jerusalem. But the more serious charges were that he wasted his estate, resorted to threats, and "attempted by violent means to compel his wife and children to embrace the Jewish religion and . . . threatened to shoot the family."⁵⁵

On May 15, two days after the lengthy presentation of the family's charges against Cresson, his attorneys, Horatio Hubbell, Josiah Randall, and William L. Brown, began to counter some of the charges, especially those that questioned Cresson's competency to handle his business affairs. The defense showed that he purchased two neglected farms since his marriage and that in each case he improved the property and was a good provider. Newspapers noted that "a large number of his friends testified that they had had dealings with him and always considered him of sane mind, that his buildings were properly constructed and his farm well attended to."⁵⁶ As proof that Cresson's own family respected his business acumen, letters were introduced showing that members of his family asked him to return "and help them sell the farm . . . as they are not capable to do this without [him]."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *The Key of David*, 211-217; *Occident*, XXI (1863), 203-205; *The Daily News*, May 13, 1851; *Public Ledger*, May 14, 1851. I have conducted a very intensive search for the trial record, but I was informed that it was destroyed by fire in the Prothonotary's Office in 1879. To reconstruct the trial, I have used Cresson's own account, newspaper reports, and the lengthy report in the *Occident*, XXI (1863), Nos. 5, 6, and 7.

⁵⁶ *Daily News*, May 15, 1851.

⁵⁷ *The Key of David*, 212.

Cresson was sensitive to the charge that he neglected his family. He noted that he had signed over to his wife half the mortgage on his property and that he had written to his family on January 14, 1851, proposing an amicable settlement to save costs of litigation. He had promised to rent a house for himself and to support his family, provided he was allowed, as he put it, "to enjoy my rights unmolested." He admitted that he wanted his wife to convert to Judaism but denied that he had used any threats against her. He wrote in his account of the trial that his family was not only attempting to cheat him of his estate but also of his inheritance from his father and his brother Clement. He placed much of the blame on Elliot, his older brother, and called him the great "Haman" of the case. As for rumors that he told Rabbi Isaac Leiser that he would give all his money to rebuild the Temple, how could he have promised that as long as Mount Moriah was still occupied by the Turkish Mosque of Omar?"⁵⁸

There were altogether seventy-three witnesses called by Cresson's lawyers, including outstanding physicians who testified that he was sane, many prominent members of the Jewish community, including some notable national figures such as Mordecai M. Noah of New York. But surely the most unusual defense witness was Colonel Peter A. Browne, described as a man "ardently devoted to pursuits of science . . . exploring an almost untrodden tract of experimental investigation." Colonel Browne testified that he had discovered a remarkable characteristic always manifested in the hair root, based on a careful examination of thousands of specimens of hair for the past few years. When he observed the root (or button) under a microscope, a regular, pestle shape and a clear, translucent color, were invariably indicative of a normal personality. The hair root of an insane person, on the other hand, was dark in color, neither transparent nor translucent and distorted in shape. Colonel Browne contended that the change in the roots of the hair was produced by a bodily disease, and that since insanity was a physical ailment it naturally caused changes in hair structure. He admitted that a purely physical ailment might cause such alterations in hair structure of a sane person, but then, obviously, the absence of such

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 219 *passim*.

symptoms, as in Cresson's case, indicated that the person was free of both physical and mental aberration. It was his opinion, formed from many conversations with the defendant and confirmed by a microscopic examination of the hair roots, that the defendant was sane.

Browne submitted to members of the jury hundreds of hair specimens collected from several lunatic asylums and his testimony made a considerable impression on all participants. The press was eventually filled with praise of his research. "This new physiological test of insanity," one reporter wrote, "deserves to be received with great regard. It is a matter well worthy of the serious attention of the Medical faculty. . . . The people of Pennsylvania . . . should be proud that Peter A. Browne was born in their state and now honors and distinguishes it by researches, experiments and discoveries worthy of a Franklin or Rittenhouse."⁵⁹

Indeed, the question of insanity excited the public as much as the titillating revelations of Cresson's religious meanderings. Newspapers compared his case to that of Morgan Hinchman, another Quaker, who was committed to Friends' Asylum by his family in circumstances similar to those involving Cresson. In April, 1849, after a painful six-month confinement at the Friends' Asylum, Hinchman brought a suit against his family and won.⁶⁰ The author of a series of articles in the *Sunday Dispatch*, using the *nom de plume* of Cola di Rienzi, compared the Cresson and Hinchman cases and strongly criticized the use of both a Sheriff's Jury and the Friends' Asylum. He called it the "Quaker Bastille," and described it as a private madhouse, "into which any citizen, at any time, may be thrown, by any combination among his relatives, should they pant with unholy cupidity to possess his property."⁶¹

⁵⁹ "A New Physiological Test of Insanity," *Public Ledger*, May 22, 1851. Colonel Browne also noted in his testimony that he was frequently called in as expert in southern courts to determine whether a witness in a criminal trial was of mixed blood. Since Negro blood disqualified a man from being a witness against a white person, Browne's testimony was often crucial.

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Mrs. Ada Rose, of the staff of the Friends' Hospital in Philadelphia, for placing at my disposal the records related to the Hinchman trial. For Quaker attitudes on the treatment of insanity, see *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal*, Apr. 26, 1851, May 3, 1851, May 10, 1851.

⁶¹ *Sunday Dispatch*, June 15, 1851, July 6, 1851. Referring to the Hinchman trial, "Cola di Rienzi" noted that: "all plotters against him appear to have belonged to one church, the Orthodox Quakers, who were proprietors of the private madhouse and whose proverbial benevolence afforded an effective cloak to their base designs."

On May 16, 1851, David Paul Brown made his final presentation for Cresson's family. Newspaper reports credited him with a spirited summation in an attempt to prove Cresson insane. Letters that the latter had written to his wife from Jerusalem were introduced as proof of his aberration. Some newspaper accounts were critical of this use of personal correspondence and Cresson himself complained bitterly about "the use of my most confidential letters, written . . . upon a subject of the most delicate nature, prohibited by the Law of God and which only ought to be known between husband and wife."⁶² Others noted that Brown's concluding remarks were "un-charitable," and appealed to religious prejudice. What was most ironic was that he had defended Hinchman two years previously and that he now used arguments for proving insanity that he himself had attacked in that case.⁶³

It was the closing defense speech of Horatio Hubbell, made to a crowded courtroom on May 16, that elicited the most favorable comment in the press.⁶⁴ Referring to Cresson as "an earnest inquirer after truth," Hubbell made the issue of religious freedom the dominant one. He dismissed the charge of sectarianism against his client. Should Cresson be blamed if he became a convert to Judaism, "that old and venerable faith whose institutes were founded amid the solitudes of Sinai . . . [and] which belongs to a people hoary with antiquity—whose history exhibits them tenaciously preserving the golden thread of their religion amid the shock and dissolution of empires. . . ?" He stressed the right of free Americans to worship as they pleased. "Thank God, we are here free indeed. . . . Follower of Christ and the child of Israel alike protected. . . . The Turk might erect his mosque [and] the votary of Vishnu might dream securely of the mysteries of the sacred waters of his Ganges. Such are the blessings of our republican institutions." He quoted Jefferson that as long as one fulfills his obligations as a citizen "it is immaterial whether a man worships one god or twenty."

⁶² *The Key of David*, 218, 225.

⁶³ *Public Ledger*, May 17, 19, 20, 1851. Hubbell pointedly reminded Brown of the Hinchman case when Brown argued against the family's meddling. Brown, a flamboyant attorney, wrote extensively about the Hinchman case but he made no mention of the Cresson trial. David Paul Brown, *The Forum, or Forty Years Full Practice* (Philadelphia, 1856); R. E. Brown, ed., *The Forensic Speeches of David Paul Brown* (Philadelphia, 1873).

⁶⁴ Hubbell's speech to the jury was not available in its entirety until Isaac Leiser published it in the *Occident*, XXI (1863), 203-213, 248-255, 301-309.

Hubbell was critical of "the disgusting zeal of the relatives," and characterized their accusations as rumor mongering, motivated by greed. He blamed Elliot, Cresson's eldest brother, a man keenly interested in the colonization of Liberia, for many of the false accusations. Referring to him as the "dark phantom," Hubbell argued that "if one is crazy upon the subject of religion, the other may be pronounced so upon the subject of slavery."⁶⁵ Since a number of the accusations against Cresson were related to events more than twenty years old, Hubbell insisted that the "delusions" had to be proved as existing *in praesenti*. He cited many decisions dealing with lunacy and drew distinctions between eccentric behavior and actual mental disease.⁶⁶ He denied that Cresson had joined as many sects as was alleged. "God help the honest and conscientious inquirer, if, after he finds that one creed is not true, he should not be at liberty to adopt another, without incurring the danger of being branded a madman and consigned to the custody of a committee and an asylum." In any event, he concluded, "the soul may, like the dove of Noah, return to its Almighty Master, without ever having once found a dry spot on which to rest its foot."⁶⁷

As for some of the specific charges against his client, Hubbell staged an effective defense, portraying Cresson as "an agriculturist, a tiller of the ground . . . the most primitive and the most honorable occupation that man can pursue." He was a gentleman whose "education and manners introduced him into the society of such enlightened and distinguished individuals as Sir Moses Montefiore. . . ." The accusations of "delusions" and "odd behavior" were without foundation. The dove that Cresson took to Jerusalem was no more odd than a parrot, a mocking bird, or a lap dog taken on trips. "Had Mr. Cresson been upon his trial for witchcraft, instead of lunacy, the gentleman [*David Paul Brown*] might have argued that the poor dove, the emblem of peace and love, should be classed in the same category with the black cat of some old and wrinkled hag." As for the American flag, why shouldn't Cresson, a commissioned officer in the service of his country, take this emblem to Jerusalem? Didn't Poinsett, former ambassador to Mexico, wrap himself in the colors

⁶⁵ *Occident*, XXI (1863), 209.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 208. Cresson compared some of the accusations directed against him with the Hinchman case. *The Key of David*, 329-330.

⁶⁷ *Occident*, XXI (1863), 249.

of his country before an infuriated populace and awe them into silence? Hubbell added dramatically: "Should it be ever your lot to wander on a foreign strand . . . you will feel that that flag . . . is the symbol of the might and majesty of that great republic whose victorious cannon have thundered over billows and whose protecting arms sustain its children as far as winds can waft or waters roam."

He effectively parried the other allegations of insanity. Cresson, he argued, could not be blamed for assuming that he saw the embalmed body of King David. Had not Dr. John P. Durbin, the Methodist President of Dickinson College and a recent visitor to the Holy Land, described David's Tomb in his books? Had not others claimed that they saw such relics as "wood of the true cross?" As for Cresson's statement to his wife that he saw angels during circumcision, Hubbell explained that this was "one of those pious and beautiful impressions of the human heart that religion has sanctioned in times of stress." In any case, "the operation . . . was so clumsily performed that it produced . . . a fever . . . and delirium."

Cresson's attorney struck hard at the testimony of the relatives. He lashed out at the wife, who, he said, violated marriage vows by not adhering to her husband "through bad report and good report." As for Jacob, Warder's son, he was described as "Ham of modern times," who, instead of hiding his father's imperfections, exposed them to the world. James and John P. Townsend, Cresson's brothers-in-law, were also upbraided for seeking to condemn him on unsubstantiated charges.

Hubbell showed that sectarianism was widespread among Cresson's relatives and acquaintances. The latter's son-in-law, Alexander F. Porter, had been, at various times, a Presbyterian, an Episcopalian, and a Millerite who believed the world would end in 1843. John Dubois, whose son Cresson had tutored from 1832 to 1835, testified against Cresson, citing religious arguments with him as far back as 1832, yet Dubois himself was first an Episcopalian, then a Baptist, and finally a Disciple of Christ, a recently organized sect. When he was asked in court for the tenets of his new church, he replied that "he doesn't know whether they wash their feet, but believes they wash their faces." Hubbell sought to show that anti-Semitism was the basis for the family's antagonism toward Cresson. "To dare embrace Judaism was something beyond . . . comprehension, a

thing unheard of; thus endeavoring to stigmatize the venerable faith of Israel . . . to stamp anyone as a lunatic who dared believe in its sublime yet simple doctrines."⁶⁸

To contradict the testimony of the relatives (of the nine witnesses who testified against Cresson, five were relatives), Hubbell cited the statements of seventy-three witnesses, thirty-eight of whom were Christians. Four doctors certified that in their opinion Cresson was sane.⁶⁹ Rabbi Joseph Schwarz (author of *A Descriptive Geography and Brief Historical Sketch of Palestine*), who met him in Palestine, a companion on the trip to England, and Mordecai M. Noah, all confirmed that they considered his deportment to be normal. The testimony of Colonel Peter A. Browne, about whom Hubbell said that "no man living has accumulated such a mass of facts, not only as it regards human hair but also as to the hairy or wooly covering of all . . . animals," was cited as final proof that Cresson was "of sound and uninjured intellect . . . perfectly capable . . . of managing and disposing his own affairs."

In his final remarks, Hubbell returned to the theme of religious toleration, this time appealing for the jurors' understanding and sympathy in regard to Cresson's conversion. "Had it been your lot, gentlemen, like Warder Cresson, to have wandered by the brook of Kedron, the solitudes of Mount Tabor, and the banks of the Jordan—had you there opened the prophetic page, you might have doubted whether Jesus of Nazareth was the one who in the gory vision of Isaiah came from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah; you would perhaps have discovered no trace of the Son of Man upon the fiery scroll of Ezekiel . . . as you looked around and beheld a land under the Mohammedan rule . . . desolated by violence, you would perhaps again have doubted whether the fullness of time had indeed come . . . you would have felt your faith shaken."

Hubbell concluded by asking the jury to show Cresson "that charity that soothes and solaces, that Christian love that triumphed over the persecutions of the Pharisees." He pleaded with them not to consign Cresson "to the gloomy walls of an insane asylum [and] to relentless persecutors, who, like the Inquisitors of Spain, would

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 305–306.

⁶⁹ Cresson was supported by testimony presented by a Jewish physician converted to Christianity! See, *Deutsch-Amerikanische Skizzen* (Leipzig, 1857), 61–63.

gloat with malignant vengeance over their immolated victim, as they forced him to sacrifice his faith and wrung by the application of their tortures a reluctant renunciation of the holiest privileges of his conscience!"⁷⁰

Judge King's charge to the jury was in a sense favorable to Cresson for it emphasized that the jurors could not take into consideration religious beliefs in the determination of insanity. One reporter wrote that this charge "fell like a thunderbolt on the lawyers, the jury and the court room audience. What! A Jew to have constitutional rights of conscience? Vulgar bigotry stood appalled."⁷¹

The dramatic speech made by Horatio Hubbell and the favorable evidence given by so many witnesses had an obvious effect on the jury. It took only a little while for them to return with a verdict and shortly after noon on May 19, 1851, Cresson was vindicated of all charges.

The Philadelphia newspapers were almost unanimous in their praise of the results of the trial. They emphasized the issue of religious freedom. Noting that Warder Cresson was perhaps "fickle" and "of unsteady disposition" in his choice of sects, they quickly added that it was his conversion to Judaism, and the anger which this caused the family, that precipitated the suit. "If he had become a Roman Catholic they would probably have acquiesced. . . . They could permit him to become a Shaker, a Millerite, or a Mormon, but when he became a Jew, all confidence in his sanity was lost." The newspapers hinted that greed may have been a factor in the family's action since "if a man is poor, he may change his faith every year; it will excite no resistance." The *Sunday Dispatch* wished Cresson "safe deliverance from the Philistines."⁷² The *Public Ledger*, commenting on the case "so familiar to the people of Philadelphia," stated that the verdict sanctioned a "prominent constitutional right of every republican citizen, to exercise freedom of conscience without derogation to his liberty, property or life . . . settling forever the principle that a man's religious opinions never can be made a test of his sanity." The newspaper concluded: "God save the trial by jury and the Habeas Corpus, which every day become more pre-

⁷⁰ *Occident*, XXI (1863), 308-309.

⁷¹ *The Key of David*, 235.

⁷² *The Sunday Dispatch*, May 18, 1851.

cious.”⁷³ Warder Cresson, about whom it was written that “they charged him with being changeable, until they found that nothing they could do would change him” now could return to implement his unchangeable dream, the restoration of the Jewish people to the soil of Palestine.

*“The Hebrew seers announce in time
The return of Judah to her prime;
Some Christians deeme it then at hand.
Here was an object: Up and do!
With seed and tillage help renew—
Help reinstate the Holy Land. . . .”*⁷⁴

Seeing “signs” of “divine preparation” everywhere, Cresson hastened to return to Palestine. In a short work, *Signs of Messiah*, published in 1851, he enumerated some of them: a proliferation of railroads; the use of the telegraph; the California gold strike; anti-slavery agitation; drought in Egypt and great power competition in the Near East. To Cresson, these “omens” were fulfilling the prophecies of the Scriptures. He was more than ever convinced that the “Great Sabbath” was about to commence, “restoration” was at hand, and that “some neutral power, as America alone is, must first begin the great work.” She alone could act “irrespective of the European ‘Balance of Power,’ and . . . will not be likely to excite the Jealousy of any of the Five Great Powers . . . in the great territorial and political strife now about to spring up . . . for Palestine.” He alluded to social and political unrest in Europe, and commented that “all Christian powers believe . . . that the restoration of the Jews must come . . . and the whole Christian world must soon find some standard or centre to correct their divided condition and doctrines.” He believed that the time had come for a power, such as the Jews,

⁷³ *The Public Ledger*, May 22, 1851. The question of newspaper coverage was as important in the Cresson trial as it had been in Hinchman’s, with all parties seeking to profit from it. Brown was especially annoyed with the *Sunday Dispatch* report which characterized his concluding remarks to the jury as “a very uncharitable and indiscreet attack upon the Jewish religion.” *The Sunday Dispatch* compared the Cresson and Hinchman cases (both men were originally convicted by a Sheriff’s jury), and argued in favor of an elected or popular judiciary, an issue in the political campaign at that time. *The Key of David*, 228 *passim*.

⁷⁴ Bezanson, 64.

to be "planted in Palestine . . . to prevent the aggression of Russia from the North and Egypt from the South."⁷⁵

Cresson's conviction that the Jewish people held the key to solving mankind's most pressing problems became more intense following the trial. In a conversation he had with Dr. John P. Durbin, whose writings on the Near East were quoted at the trial,⁷⁶ he was told: "Mr. Cresson, I was born a Christian, but from my late researches in the East, if I had been born a Jew, I would have no reason to change my religion." Cresson replied: "Dr. Durbin, I also was born a Christian, but from my late researches in the East, I had reason to change my religion and I became a Jew."⁷⁷

Indeed, Cresson's convictions on the power of Judaism led him to write statements that could easily have come from the pens of anti-Semites rather than philo-Semites. "It is said," he commented, "that the destiny of all Europe is in the hands of the Jew and that they have such wealth and power now in their hands that they can put down the stock and say: 'You shall not go to war.'"⁷⁸ More specific pronouncements on planned settlements in Palestine followed.

Cresson also published in 1851 *The Great Restoration and Consolidation of Israel in Palestine*, addressing it to "the Jews of the House of Israel, scattered throughout the United States of America, Eng-

⁷⁵ *Siemen Messeah: Signs of Messiah and the Peace for the Manifestation of the Glory and Kingdom of God* (n.d., 1851?) 1-24.

⁷⁶ John P. Durbin, *Observations in the East . . . Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor* (New York, 1845). Durbin wrote: "Perhaps a more wretched population is to be found nowhere on earth than the mass of the Jews in the Holy City." I, 256. Yet, like Cresson, Durbin expected this "city of desolation" to become once more the center of a restored Zion and he concluded that "the Jews, as a people, will be restored to Palestine and there constitute a political state." This was to be accompanied by a general conversion to Christianity. *Ibid.*, I, 317. Durbin was the vice-president of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, an organization that published the conversionist *Jewish Chronicle*. He often praised the activities of the London Society for Promoting Christianity that was so bitterly attacked by Cresson in the pages of the *Occident*. *Jewish Chronicle*, II (1854)1, 1-6.

⁷⁷ *Siemen Messeah*, 10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-13. Cresson quoted a lengthy passage from Durbin's *Observations in the East* in which the Jews are credited with being masters not only of Europe's chancellories, but are cited as the world's foremost musicians, soldiers, and founders of the Society of Jesus! It is not clear whether Cresson knew that Durbin was quoting from Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby* (London, 1844), 208 ff. In this work, a character named Sidonia speaks at length on the beneficent influence of the Jews upon world civilization.

land and all of Europe.”⁷⁹ He suggested the formation of a “Great American and Foreign Association for Colonizing and Promoting the Welfare and Interests of the Jewish People.” The function of this committee was to urge the recognition of the Hebrew people by the powers of America and Europe, and to facilitate the emigration to Palestine. Financial aid was to be extended to those already settled there. Cresson urged the establishment of infant, juvenile, and adult schools and the instruction of the settlers in “agriculture and rural sciences.”

In 1852, on the eve of his departure for Palestine, he published in Philadelphia his most ambitious religious work, *The Key of David*, which he had begun writing in Jerusalem in 1847 and to which he now appended “The Lunacy Case or the Great Lawsuit for Becoming a Jew.”⁸⁰ *The Key of David*, described by a reviewer in the *Occident* as possessing a “great degree of shrewdness and not a small share of scathing argumentative power,” was primarily an attempt on Cresson’s part to show the essential differences between Christianity and Judaism. He urged the Christian readers to follow his example and “to learn wisdom and first principles.” At the end of the work, Cresson appended “Expenses of time and money in going from Philadelphia to Jerusalem.”

In October, 1852, Isaac Leeser wrote in the pages of the *Occident* that Michael Boaz Israel, “a thorough farmer, [is] returning to Palestine to open . . . an extensive farm outside of Jerusalem in the Valley of Rephaim.” He added, “How glad we shall be to record in

⁷⁹ Warder Cresson, *The Great Restoration and Consolidation of Israel in Palestine* . . . (Philadelphia, 1851). Cresson was obviously affected by the questions of slavery and secession that were agitating the country. “The question of Union,” he wrote, was not only agitating Israel, “but also this great and extensive republic of ours from the farthest North to the farthest South.” *Ibid.*, 4. But he insisted that “with the question of slavery Israel has nothing to do, the law or God settles it forever.” Unlike his brother Elliot, a colonizationist active in settling American Negroes in Liberia, Cresson rejected any effort to change the status of slaves. “They are equally foolish who endeavor to promote Ham or the Negro above his sphere and place as predetermined by the word of God, as those who try to keep Israel back from his.” *Ibid.*, 4 *passim*.

⁸⁰ Cresson not only recounted the main arguments at the trial but also appended newspaper articles and editorial comments. A short review of *The Key of David* in the *Occident* concluded with the remark: “we do not wish to be considered as endorsing all Mr. C advances . . . but we must refer those of our readers who are fond of high-seasoned polemical writing to the pages of Mr. Cresson.” *Ibid.*, X (1852), 102–103.

EXPENSES OF TIME AND MONEY IN GOING FROM
PHILADELPHIA TO JERUSALEM.

	Days.	1st. Class.	2d. Class.	
From Philadelphia to London,	11 by steam,	\$100	\$60	Meals included.
From London to Marseilles,	2 and 2 nights,*	29	24	Meals not inc'd.
From Marseilles to Malta,	2½ by steam,	30	25	Meals included.
From Malta to Alexandria and Beyrout,	3½ by steam,	29	24	Meals included.
From Beyrout to Jaffa,	1 and ¼ a night by st'm,	1 50	1 50	Meals not inc'd.
From Jaffa to Jerusalem,	1 by horse, or mule,	1 25	1 00	Meals not inc'd.
	21½ days.	\$190 75	\$135 50	

A person wishing to go on without any delay, must take a Steamer here, so as to meet the French Government Steamers which leave Marseilles on the 10th and 25th of every month, and the price is one-third less than upon the English Steamers.

If you go direct from Marseilles to Alexandria and Beyrout, you can save nearly the 68 hours, or about 2¾ days passage, besides the expense.

You can go on from Malta to Smyrna in 3½ days for 135 francs, or \$25 65; and from Smyrna to Beyrout in 3¼ for 275 piastres, or for about \$12.

The English Steamer Novelty leaves Beyrout on the last day of every month, stops at Jaffa, and then runs on to Alexandria.

* By Railroad and Steamer.

future numbers of our work the triumph of this redoubtable convert, and we wish him and his labors in the outset, a hearty 'God Speed.'"⁸¹

The pages of the *Occident* were indeed filled with all sorts of information about Palestine. While much of it still had to do with the work of both Christian missionaries and Jewish organizations collecting money for the needy in the Holy Land, the emphasis was shifting to discussions of practical measures to be taken for the establishment of agricultural settlements. Leeson was becoming more and more convinced that the land was suitable for cultivation and that Jews were capable of becoming farmers.

To prove that "the world will see the Valley of Rephaim glowing under a rich harvest and the plains of Jezreel covered with the richest increase," Leeson even quoted with approval an extract from an English Episcopal paper that described an industrial plantation near Jerusalem and referred to the Jews as an industrious and enterprising people, whose ranks contained most of the tailors, bakers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, watchmakers and glaziers in Palestine."⁸² Other reports spoke of the unusually large fruit harvest, the introduction of mulberry trees, and the possibility of olive oil and soap export.

Cresson's first important plan for colonization appeared in the pages of the *Occident* early in 1853. Entitled "Circular Letter, for the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁸² *Ibid.*, X (1853), 604 *passim*. The article quoted by Leeson described at length the success of M's farm, the name omitted by Leeson "because he is an apostate Jew." This was very likely John Meshullam, an English Jew who converted to Christianity and established in the 1840's a colony called *Artoz* near Bethlehem. Charles A. Minor, *Meshullam, or Tidings from Jerusalem . . .* (Philadelphia, 1851), 121 ff.; *The Presbyterian*, Apr. 19, 1851. Leeson's *Occident* was filled with reports on Palestine projects organized by both Jews and non-Jews. On Dec. 20, 1852, an English group calling itself an Association for Promoting Jewish Settlement in Palestine, presented a program for the purchase and development of land, as well as for the expansion of industry in Palestine. The plan called for the development of Haifa, Acre, and Tiberias for maritime trade. *Occident* XI (1853), 71-75, 77. Leeson wrote that "it would be delightful to learn in a course of few years that the ports of Palestine were able to send out ships freighted with the products of Jewish industry to foreign climes . . . [to] find a market in the ports of France, England and America. *Ibid.*, XII (1854), 467-468. Another interesting experiment in communal living was that of the Philadelphia-born Clarinda S. Minor, who also described her colony to the readers of the *Occident*, XII (1854), 200-206; see also *ibid.*, XI (1854), 485. Mrs. Minor wrote that she wanted "to emancipate from worse than American slavery, the half-covered, starving, imprisoned, spirit-crushed Hebrew captives of Palestine."

Promotion of Agricultural Pursuits and also for the Establishment of a Soup-House for the Destitute Jews of Jerusalem," this was indeed a blueprint for a modern Zionist undertaking.⁸³

In Cresson's view, a "Soup-House" was essential in order "to prevent any attempts being made to take advantage of the necessities of our poor brethren, the Jews, and thus force them into a pretended conversion." It was his intention, according to the circular, to attach to that charity "a tract of land, for the purpose of setting up a model farm in the Valley of Rephaim, to introduce an improved system of English and American farming in Palestine." Cresson emphasized that "agriculture is to be Israel's vocation," and appealed for funds to purchase such modern implements as air-pressure engines for the running of gristmills, machines that would not require water or fuel, both scarce in Palestine. He was convinced that the Jews could become self-supporting there, eliminating the need for "messengers" used to collect funds among the Jews of Europe and America. He called for the creation of committees in Jerusalem, England, Germany, France and the United States to support agricultural settlements in Palestine.⁸⁴

Cresson's circular was indicative of a new concern in Palestine in the 40's and 50's. The United States, albeit in a modest fashion, showed interest in that area of the world through the appointment of consuls, intercession on behalf of Jews in Damascus, and in the dispatch of naval expeditions to explore the Dead Sea and Jordan River.⁸⁵ Other nations with traditional interests in the Near East were likewise increasingly drawn into the area. In the wake of the decline of Turkish power, their competition for political and economic concession was sharpened. The issuance in 1839 by the Sultan

⁸³ *Ibid.*, X (1853), 608 ff. Cresson's circulars were reprinted and read by Zionists on the continent. *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, XVII (1854), 369, 383, 451, 453, 579-580; Karp, 9 ff. Karp described Cresson's circular as a "classical Zionist argument."

⁸⁴ *Occident*, X (1853), 611-612. The Corresponding Committee included Abraham Hart, Michael M. Allen and Isidore Raphael for the United States, Marcus H. Bresslau and Lionel Abrahams for England, and Dr. Wolf Schlesinger for Germany. Cresson represented Palestine.

⁸⁵ E. P. Montague, ed., *Narrative of the Late Expedition to the Dead Sea* (Philadelphia, 1849); W. F. Lynch, *Narrative of the U. S. Expedition to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea* (Philadelphia, 1849); Lt. W. F. Lynch, *Official Report of the United States Expedition to Explore the Dead Sea and the River Jordan* (Baltimore, 1852); C. Alpert, "Two American Naval Expeditions to Palestine, 1848 and 1854," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (1950-1951), 281-287.

Abdul Mejid of the Hatt-I-Sherif, a reform decree, which granted equality to non-Muslim people, kindled hopes in the minds of those Jews and Christians who expected the Sultan to permit land purchases in Palestine. Thus, in a complex confluence of political, commercial, and religious interests, the Near East became the focal point for many groups and many nations.

Such interests were especially notable in England; philo-Semites, such as the British consul to Jerusalem, James Finn, military men, such as Colonel George Gawler, who proposed in 1845 the establishment of small Jewish colonies and who wrote on the strategic importance of Palestine, promoted the resettlement of the Holy Land. In the mid-1850's, a messianic-minded Canadian living in England, George Wentworth Monk, published *A Simple Interpretation of Revelation*, in which he prophesied the speedy return of the Jews to Palestine. These ideas influenced, among others, Holman Hunt, a painter of the pre-Raphaelite school, John Ruskin, the famous art critic, and Laurence Oliphant, a well-known diplomat.⁸⁶

The outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854 stimulated such thinking even more. To Cresson, the struggle among the great powers of Europe, that began with the disagreement over the protection of the Holy Places, was again an opportunity to ask for aid from Jews in America and Europe. He wrote to Leeser in 1854 and pleaded for the restoration of Palestine as a homeland "not only for the surplus of unemployed Israelites of Poland, Russia, Galicia, Hungary, and Turkey," but also as an asylum for "the harassed and distressed Israelites to flee to from the horrors of the present war . . . to study their most holy Divine Law . . . instead of Israelite being arrayed against Israelite of the above named different countries to shed each other's blood."⁸⁷ Cresson appealed for increased funds because the war raised the price of food.

⁸⁶ H. Wentworth Monk, *A Simple Interpretation of the Revelation* . . . (London, 1859). Monk also scanned the lines from Daniel and Isaiah for signs of the "revelation." He noted that "railroads, steamboats, telegraph, steam, printing presses etc., render the universal government of the millenium quite practicable." *Ibid.*, 150. Monk was acquainted with Meshullam and Cresson. He described the "strange household" of Cresson where "husband and wife knew not one word of each other's language and had to converse entirely by signs." Richard S. Lambert, *For the Time is at Hand* (London, 1947).

⁸⁷ *Occident*, XII (1854), 351 *passim*.

His ideas on agricultural settlements showed increased reflection. He proposed that these land holdings be divided into small family plots for five to seven families. This arrangement, he felt, would make possible defense and facilitate learning by example among the family groups. It would also prevent, he assumed, "a monopoly of power and wealth by any one person." As a teacher of agriculture, he proposed himself. "It is well known," he wrote to Leiser in 1854, "that I purchased two farms near the city of Philadelphia . . . one consisting of 112 acres and the other of about 60 acres, both of which when I bought them were in a state of entire barrenness and unprofitableness . . . buildings and fences were only heaps of ruins and decay; but through industry and perseverance . . . between five and six years, I had the pleasure of seeing my land in the most fruitful and profitable condition . . . so that it was said that my farms were the best in all the neighborhood."

He told of an American corvette, commanded by a Captain Turner, which sailed into Jaffa and came to the aid of some American citizens who were driven off their properties by marauding Arabs. Captain Turner had the bandits apprehended and they were handed over to the Turkish authorities who imprisoned them. Since that incident, Cresson wrote to Leiser, the Americans "have been treated with the greatest deference and respect." He ended his letter by pleading for protection from the President of the United States, especially during the "infancy" of the Palestine settlement.⁸⁸

In a lengthy letter of November 27, 1854, to one of his American supporters, Abraham Hart, a noted Philadelphia publisher, Cresson described his acquisition of a garden near Jaffa, effective the following June. The property belonged to David Closson, a recent convert to Judaism, who offered the estate for a yearly rental of 1500 *piasters*. Cresson wrote that he preferred to invest money in the estate rather than continue to support the "soup society," a charity obviously inadequate in a community "without a single industrial habit, without means and without knowledge in agriculture." Cresson informed Hart, as well as his supporters in Europe, that he

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 354-355. The members of Cresson's Committee who signed this circular were Rabbi J. H. Markus, Benjamin Lilienthal, Dr. Moses Sachs and Raphael Ginea.

planned to concentrate his efforts on training young men, since "doing anything with the older members here is all labor lost, for . . . they know nothing but receiving all the money they can get and then spending it." He intended to train the youths in silk culture as well as in broom making. He felt he was working against the clock. "The moral and physical condition of the Jews . . . demands something of Agricultural Industry being introduced . . . without delay," he wrote, noting that "grog shops and dishonesty" had increased at an alarming rate. He was hurt by criticism of those who questioned his motives and accused him of living on the money sent to the poor, despite, as he retorted, the fact that he had given "hundreds" out of his own small "pittance."⁸⁹

Early in 1855, Cresson also informed Leeser of his plans for the Jaffa estate and outlined "A Few Practical Observations Before Commencing Agriculture in the East." He described in detail problems having to do with planting and seeding, and noted the usefulness of such crops as lemons for the manufacture of citric acid. Advising the planting of bananas, sugar cane, and pineapples, he had apparently requested seeds for the latter from American friends. The planting of orchards and the establishment of stores to sell surplus produce at Jaffa were among his recommendations. Once again, Cresson urged that committees be appointed in both England and America to work with him in overseeing and managing the gardens and the store.

Not everything looked propitious: "We have the garden to pay for, a change of mules to buy . . . we must supply food for the cattle and for ourselves, until we can receive something in return for our labor. . . . Our society is nearly all poor." Cresson also expressed worry about the possible influx of manufactures. When he learned that Judah Touro, a Jewish philanthropist from New Orleans, had left a bequest of \$50,000 for the Palestine needy, Cresson was concerned that this money might be used for the start of manufactures there. "Well I know in America," he wrote, "that there cannot be any comparison between the virtue and health that exist in the

⁸⁹ The Clossen estate had been rented up to that time by Mrs. Minor. *The Asmonean*, Mar. 30, 1855, II, 189.

manufacturing districts and in the agricultural; the former have been justly styled dens of vice, immorality and oppression." Cresson was grateful that "the good hand of Providence was against Jerusalem ever becoming a manufacturing city, owing to the great scarcity of water-power for mills and coal or fuel for steam-power."⁹⁰

Cresson's correspondence with Leeser in 1856 seemed to contain some indications of the possibility of eventual failure of his project. There were fewer references to the agricultural plans and more questions about the Jewish historical experience. He asked: "Why do the Jews suffer so much, and are so poor and despised in this world?" He confessed that in the last six months conditions were considerably worse in Jerusalem and "the wants of the poor and needy and the cries of the widow and orphan . . . still rife in our streets." Thirty years earlier in Philadelphia, Cresson used similar language to describe the miserable conditions in that city. He agreed that suffering exalts, "but oh! What a very long night of suffering," he wrote.⁹¹

The remaining four years of Cresson's life were apparently uneventful. It is known that he married Rachel Moleano and had two children, David Ben Zion and Abigail Ruth, and that he remained more or less an object of curiosity, a bearded patriarch, whom people saw treading the alleys of Jerusalem. He never became a major figure like his contemporary Melville, who, fearing the effects of industrialization, looked to Palestine as the source of human experience and a possible hope for the future. Spending his lifetime in exploring the uncharted areas of the mythical and mystical aspects of the human character, Herman Melville borrowed money in order to go to Palestine. There, in January, 1856, he met Cresson. But the trip shattered his illusions. Palestine seemed to him a symbol of a dying world rather than of nativity. "In the emptiness of the lifeless antiquity of Jerusalem," Melville wrote in his *Journal*,⁹² "the migrant Jews are like flies that have taken up their abode in a skull." Cresson's theories on agriculture he quickly dismissed. "The idea of

⁹⁰ *Occident*, XIII (1855), 133 ff.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, XIV (1856), 122-129.

⁹² H. C. Horsford, ed., Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and Levant* (Princeton, 1955); L. Baritz, *City on a Hill* (New York, 1964), 286 *passim*.

making farmers of the Jews is vain. In the first place, Judea is a desert, with few exceptions. In the second place, the Jews hate farming . . . and besides the number of Jews in Palestine is comparatively small. And how are the hosts of them scattered in other lands to be brought here? Only by a miracle." About Cresson, he noted in his *Journal*: "Warder Crisson [*sic*] of Philadelphia—an American turned Jew—divorced from (former) wife—married a Jewess, etc., Sad —." ⁹³

It is clear that Cresson and Palestine affected Melville deeply. Out of his impressions of the journey emerged a long, spiritual poem, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*. Nathan, a Christian turned Jew, one of the leading characters of this unusual work, was obviously patterned after Cresson. ⁹⁴ Both Melville and Cresson considered themselves outcasts from a society that removed itself from a historical mooring. Both men filtered the inconsistencies and unfulfilments of the "American Dream" through their works and personal commitments and spoke out against the "impieties of 'Progress'." ⁹⁵

Until a search of records in Israel reveals more particulars about his life, Cresson's final years will remain shrouded in mystery. He died on October 27, 1860, ⁹⁶ at Jerusalem, after a short illness, his life and works constituting a prism which reflected so many of the tendencies of that age. The consequences of conversion to Judaism, the issue of religious freedom, the effect of national movements upon the Jews and changes in social and economic organization, these are examples of trends connected with Cresson's unusual career. A man of contradictions, he bore witness to the persistence of mysticism

⁹³ Horsford, 143, 154, 160-161. Melville met most of the American colonists. He mentioned a Mrs. Minot [*sic*] who came "to start a kind of Agricultural Academy for Jews." *Ibid.*, 157. Howard mistakenly repeats Melville's spelling of "Crisson" and "Minot." L. Howard, *Herman Melville* (University of California Press, 1951), 247-248.

⁹⁴ Bezanson, 542-543.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁹⁶ Many sources, including the genealogical records of the Cresson family, list Nov. 6, 1860, as the date of Cresson's death. The date November 11 is mentioned in another family document. William R. Page, United States Consul in Jerusalem, noted in a despatch on November 8, that Warder Cresson died on October 27. Karp, 1. Cresson's son, David ben Zion, died in 1863; his daughter, Abigail Ruth, succumbed to cholera in 1865. *Ibid.*, 20; *Occident*, XVIII, 256.

at a time when the Romantic Age in Europe was giving way to "higher criticism," through the efforts of men such as David Friedrich Strauss. Cresson sought a religious solution to the problems posed during his lifetime by such thinkers as Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx. But, unlike those two, Cresson's life was a story of a self-fulfilling prophecy. He was an American who sought a "passport to Utopia."⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The American as Reformer* (New York, 1968), 19.