

THE JEWS OF THE UNITED STATES

By ABRAM S. ISAACS

The record of the Jews of the United States each succeeding year, as the population steadily increases, with corresponding growth in religious, charitable and educational institutions, becomes more and more noteworthy. There has always been a fair development along various lines in the peculiarly happy atmosphere that is so genial for all religions; but the marked changes that have followed successive landslides of immigrants to American shores have demanded broader and more effective agencies, and given, to a certain degree, shape and direction to our community. While in many countries the mediæval spirit still prevails, making the Jew a wanderer and outcast, on American soil he seems to be preparing a distinctly new era, and, composed of representatives of every clime and nationality, American Israel meets with full confidence the currents of the time. No such phenomena have ever been experienced by the Jew in all the lands and ages of his dispersion as are here presented; and, despite aberrations and contradictions that cannot be disguised and certain dangerous tendencies, which appear somewhat to affect all creeds under rapid transit American conditions, the genius of the Jew, his adaptativeness, energy, persistency, is finding ample field for the highest and most varied endeavor.

The year's record of new immigration from September, 1898, to September, 1899, is not yet complete, but the returns furnished by the United States Bureau of Immigration from June, 1898, to June, 1899, show 37,415 under the head-

ing "Hebrews," out of a total of 311,707—a discrimination which has been properly condemned, but is held by the officials to be expedient. With but few exceptions, these thousands are quietly and satisfactorily coping with their new environment. The exact proportion of those seeking the larger cities cannot be ascertained; but each year they are scattered in greater numbers, and are selecting more varied lines of industry and occupation. Thanks to the impetus of the Hirsch Fund, agriculture is attracting hundreds. Over six hundred farms in New England respond to their activity, while in the special New Jersey settlements success has crowned their labor. The new immigrants are building communities throughout the Union. The synagogue and the school are erected to-day where a decade ago was a wilderness. Their energy is making itself felt in different ways, and as the newcomers quickly acquire a livelihood, and give their children public school education, they are proving themselves capable American citizens, yielding to no class in patriotism and public spirit. They furnished more than their quota of volunteers to the Spanish war.

The educational activity of the year was fairly gratifying. The distinct impulse towards improvement of religious school methods, which was well maintained in Philadelphia, New York and Chicago; the third Summer Assembly of the Jewish Chautauqua; the publication of works like Abrahams' "Jewish Literature" and Dembitz's "Jewish Services in Synagogue and Home," by our Publication Society, were in themselves signs of advance. Thoughtful essays marked the sessions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis held on Rev. Dr. I. M. Wise's birthday. Rev. Dr. Drachman's translation of S. R. Hirsch's "Letters of Ben Uziel," a

famous book in its day and not yet obsolete, and Rev. Dr. H. P. Mendes' "Looking Ahead," a Zionistic fantasy, were among the Jewish books of the year, to which Mrs. A. Cohnfeldt Lust's "A Tent of Grace" is to be added, and perhaps the "Dreyfus Letters," which appeared at the culmination of interest in the tragedy of Devil's Isle. Mr. Zangwill's visit, with the scintillating series of lectures that was its result, had educational as well as literary interest, and awakened vigorous and generally good-natured criticism.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the institution of Sunday services was held in Sinai Temple, Chicago, and rabbis from Cleveland, Philadelphia, Rochester, Pittsburg, etc., who sympathize with the movement, gave addresses. It cannot be said, however, that the Sunday Sabbath has proved more than an incident; it has not made the headway anticipated, and while it keenly suggests the difficulties that beset Jewish observance, it arouses effort to overcome the danger. Thus, the growth of the Council of Jewish Women, which has now 6000 contributing members, and whose branches extend throughout the country, is a happy augury. One of its most cherished principles is to promote Sabbath reverence. In addition, its circles for philanthropy and Biblical study are useful, and helpful agencies are maintained in many of the larger cities, like Chicago, Cleveland, Denver and New York. This organization was represented at the International Women's Congress held in June in London.

The flag of Zionism continues to be unfurled by earnest advocates. The body of adherents is made up from among our Russian brethren. Considerable enthusiasm was manifested by them at the annual session of the Federation at Baltimore; and even opponents, who deplore the movement

in the phase as outlined by Dr. Herzl, must acknowledge the warmth and devotion of the Zionists. The Colonial Bank secured its anticipated number of subscriptions. With the exception of a few leaders, like Prof. Gottheil and Rev. Stephen S. Wise, and sympathizers, like Rev. Drs. B. Felsenthal, G. Gottheil, M. Jastrow, H. P. Mendes, the movement has failed to influence American Jewish sentiment; and it will have to detach itself from the fantasy of a *Judenstaat*, and devote itself wholly to practical and practicable colonization, if it hopes to secure a larger following in this country.

The condition of the various Jewish orders has not changed for the better. The fact that the Cleveland Orphan Asylum and Montefiore Home have become incorporated as separate institutions, although they are supported by the B'nai B'rith and the Keshet Shel Barzel, respectively, is significant. The 50th anniversary of the Free Sons of Israel, like the 50th anniversary of the B'nai B'rith a few years ago, failed to produce any permanent enthusiasm. Still, these fraternities are large organizations; the I. O. B. B. in particular supports several useful institutions, and the problem of awakening more interest and strengthening the foundations is being carefully studied. There are those who maintain, in view of the steady decrease in membership in some districts, that the orders are on the decline, and should be disbanded. On the other hand, these symptoms are not regarded as serious by advocates of the I. O. B. B., who point to the spread of the order in Europe and the Orient, and are confident that in America it will more than regain its prestige.

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR

The marked increase in new institutions and enlargement of old ones were a feature of the year, and illustrate the growth both in numbers and benefactions. Philadelphia, always a pioneer in benevolence, began work on the new building of the Young Women's Union and the Lucien Moss Home for Incurables. New York witnessed the opening of the new Baron de Hirsch Trade School and the Clara de Hirsch Working Girls' Home, while ground was broken for the new Mt. Sinai Hospital up town and the Beth Israel Hospital down town, as well as for the new edifice of the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the gift of Mr. Jacob H. Schiff. The United Hebrew Charities dedicated its new home, the donation of Mr. Solomon Loeb. The Hebrew Infant Asylum of New York entered new quarters. The Mt. Zion Hospital of San Francisco and the new Hebrew Orphans' Home of Chicago were dedicated. The Newark Orphan Asylum made headway on its new building, and a site has been selected for the Emanu El Sisterhood Home of New York. The Touro Infirmary of New Orleans has had an annex provided, and the Atlanta Orphan Asylum opened a hospital ward. The need of more effective co-operation in benevolent work led to the conference of Jewish Charities in Cincinnati and the preliminary organization of a national society. New synagogues were dedicated in Denver, Brooklyn, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Cleveland, Atlantic City. The National Farm School at Doylestown, Pa., added appreciably to its accommodations, and revised its curriculum.

The death of Baroness de Hirsch aroused sympathetic tributes. In the necrology of the year are to be noted the

names of Jacob Ezekiel, an earnest worker for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; Jacob Baiz, of New York, Consul-General for Honduras; Dr. Sigismund Waterman, of New York, and Michael Schwab, with whom the original founders of the I. O. B. B. have passed away; and Mrs. Henrietta Heilprin, widow of Michael Heilprin, the author and philanthropist.