



HERBERT FRIEDENWALD  
1870-1944

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Editor of American Jewish Year Book 1908-1912

By HARRY SCHNEIDERMAN

**O**N APRIL 28, 1944, Doctor Herbert Friedenwald, secretary of the American Jewish Committee for seven years from its inception in November 1906, and editor of the American Jewish Year Book from 1908 to 1912, died at his home in Washington, D. C.

Herbert Friedenwald was a member of a distinguished Baltimore family, founded by Jonas Friedenwald who came to Baltimore from Germany in January, 1832. Here, two sons, Moses and Aaron, were born. Aaron studied medicine, became a highly respected physician, and the father and grandfather of physicians who have won more than local renown in the field of medicine. Herbert Friedenwald was the son of Moses, who was a merchant, and had married Jane Ahlborn, born in Manchester, England, of German Jewish immigrants. Herbert, born on September 20, 1870, was one of four children. He had three sisters, all of whom survived him: Belle (Mrs. Max) Belmont, of New York City, Racie (Mrs. Cyrus) Adler, of Philadelphia, and Merle (Mrs. Henry) Hamburger, of Baltimore. After attending private schools, Friedenwald studied at the undergraduate college at Johns Hopkins University, acquiring his A.B. in 1890; four years later, he was awarded a doctorate of philosophy degree by the University of Pennsylvania.

American history, especially its colonial and revolutionary periods, was Friedenwald's favorite subject, and his doctoral

dissertation was on the Declaration of Independence. It was this interest which enabled him to occupy for three years (1897-1900) the post of Chief of the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress, where he compiled a calendar of Washington manuscripts in the possession of the Library and other bibliographies.

Because of his deep interest in American history, combined with his close attachment to Judaism, Friedenwald naturally became a member of the small group of young men who, in 1892, established the American Jewish Historical Society, upon the suggestion of Cyrus Adler. Friedenwald became an active member of the new organization, held office in it, including membership in its Council, for many years, and contributed important articles to its *Publications*. He brought to these tasks a love for historical research, careful training in scientific procedures, a practical rather than pedantic insistence on accuracy and precision in the presentation of facts, and mastery of a simple and unaffectedly graceful literary style.

His interest in Jewish activities was not restricted to participation in the work of the Historical Society. He was a devoted friend also of the Jewish Publication Society and, for many years, a member of its Publication Committee. He was also a co-worker of the scholars who compiled the Jewish Encyclopedia, contributing one of the most important articles, that on the United States.

All these interests and talents fitted him almost ideally for the position of secretary of the American Jewish Committee, a position which he was the first to hold. The choice was especially fortunate because of Friedenwald's knowledge of American diplomatic as well as political history, for the work of the Committee was to lie largely in the field of international relations, in which expert knowledge of diplomatic precedents and procedures was essential. To Friedenwald, as its first secretary, fell the task of implementing the constitution and by-laws of the Committee, formulating organizational procedures, and establishing and maintaining

cordial relations with the small but scattered membership of the new body. It may be truly said that, during the six years of his incumbency, he established the Committee on a firm organizational foundation, and that, to a large extent, the organization has developed along the lines set by him.

In its early years the Committee was chiefly concerned, in the foreign field, with the political and civil disabilities of the Jews in Rumania and in Tsarist Russia, and, in the domestic field, with the movement to restrict immigration to the United States, and the famous passport question, growing out of Russia's refusal, in violation of a treaty, to honor the American passport when borne by American citizens who were Jews.

The Committee felt that, in opposing the restriction of immigration, it was working not only in the interests of Jews seeking a haven from persecution, but also for the maintenance of a high American tradition. Similarly, in fighting for the abrogation of the dishonored Russo-American treaty of 1832, the Committee had the deep conviction that it was fighting not only to end the legalization of discrimination by a foreign power, as between American citizens, on the basis of religion, but also to uphold and safeguard the sanctity of the American principle of equality of all citizens, regardless of ancestry or religious affiliation.

Into these two projects of the Committee Friedenwald threw himself wholeheartedly. He gave invaluable service in collecting facts to be used by those representatives of the Committee who appeared before Congressional committees, or delivered public addresses on the two subjects. He attended Congressional hearings, bringing with him voluminous reference material which was very useful to the representatives of the American Jewish Committee. Following a hearing, on December 11 and 12, 1911, before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, on resolutions proposing the abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832, Friedenwald stayed up all night correcting proofs of, and indexing, the text of the speeches and the numerous

documents which had been introduced in support of resolutions for the abrogation of the Treaty. This work made possible the printing and binding of the report of the hearing, comprising 336 pages, including a 16-page index, so that a copy was on the desk of every Representative when the House met at noon on December 13, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs unanimously recommended the adoption of a resolution for the abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832.

At the same time, under Friedenwald's direction, the small staff of the American Jewish Committee was engaged in nation-wide correspondence with Americans, non-Jewish and Jewish, eager to serve in the campaign. Newspapermen, editors, lecturers, clergymen, college and university teachers, and numerous other groups were furnished factual material regarding the history of the passport issue, and with arguments in support of the termination of the Treaty. Various publicity devices were originated, and communicated to correspondents all over the country. The American Jewish Committee did not work alone; its efforts were ably and efficiently supported by other organizations.

The result of that historic uprising of American public opinion, in defense of the equality of all citizens, is well known. To that result, Friedenwald probably made a greater contribution than any other single individual.

The passport and immigration questions were subjects frequently treated in the American Jewish Year Book during Friedenwald's editorship of that annual, on behalf of the American Jewish Committee. The Year Book was one of the many products of the inspired imagination and fertile thinking of Cyrus Adler, who persuaded the Jewish Publication Society to embark on the project of publishing it. Adler edited the first volume in 1899, and the four subsequent volumes; he and Henrietta Szold edited the sixth and seventh volumes; and Miss Szold, the eighth and ninth. Throughout these nine years, the cost of compiling and editing the Year Book, as well as the cost of printing and distribution, was

borne by the Jewish Publication Society. The Society found the combined costs too heavy a tax on its limited budget and began to consider suspension of the project. After reciting these facts, in the preface to the tenth volume (5669), Dr. Friedenwald goes on to say:

The American Jewish Committee being persuaded of the importance of the Year Book for the purpose of organizing the Jews of America into a compact whole and of its usefulness to its own organization, a joint arrangement has been entered into whereby the American Jewish Committee is responsible for the cost of the compilation of the book, and the Publication Society for its actual issuance.

This arrangement has continued since that year, 1908.

As editor, Friedenwald continued the policies of his predecessors as to content, style, and format, but it was not long before he began making improvements within the general pattern set by Dr. Adler and Miss Szold. For example, the List of Leading Events was gradually expanded and its presentation changed from a chronological to a geographical one. The number of special articles was increased. Each year, a feature article dealing with an important current issue in Jewish life was presented. The subjects treated in the five volumes edited by Friedenwald included Sunday laws in the United States and judicial decisions based on them having special interest for Jews; the defense of immigrants against the arguments of restrictionists; the agricultural activities of Jews in America, and, of course, the then perennial passport question. Friedenwald wrote a number of these articles himself. His essay on the passport question (*AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK* 5672, pp. 19-129) is a model of historical precision and succinctness of treatment.

As an editor, Friedenwald insisted on the accurate and careful presentation of facts, and on checking reports with available reference books. He was painstaking in his attention to details. He was conscious of the incompleteness of

the events in Jewish life presented in the Year Book, in those days when there were no agencies engaged in gathering news of this character, but he confidently expressed the belief that "future historians will be grateful to the editors of the American Jewish Year Book, for having, in so concise a form given the main drift of events in Jewry throughout the world."

Friedenwald resigned as secretary of the American Jewish Committee in 1913, much to the regret of its officers. Although he thus severed official relations with the Committee, he continued his interest in its activities down to the day of his death. He kept in touch also with the American Jewish Historical Society, and eagerly followed the course of Jewish life everywhere. In 1936, he and Rose Diebold Friedenwald, his wife, established the Friedenwald Foundation, in memory of his parents. The object of the Foundation is "to promote education and the advancement of higher knowledge, principally among the Jewish Youth of Baltimore; especially in the Fine Arts and preferably at Johns Hopkins University." The motto on the Foundation's seal, which was designed according to Friedenwald's instructions, is a quotation from the writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra,—*"Ve'et zenuyim chochma,"* in Hebrew; and *"Wisdom begeth humility,"* in English.

After severing his connection with the American Jewish Committee, Friedenwald traveled extensively both in the United States and abroad. He made his home in Washington, D. C., where he had many friends and acquired others. Here he served as a sort of unofficial Jewish representative, providing information on topics of Jewish interest, and otherwise helping to promote a better understanding among his many non-Jewish friends, of Jewish movements and attitudes. Unfortunately, poor health greatly restricted his activities in this and other directions.

The following statement, sent to the writer by Dr. William F. Albright of John Hopkins University, is an interesting

thumbnail sketch of Dr. Friedenwald's personality and of his interests:

Dr. Friedenwald had an excellent mind and was interested in everything human. He possessed unusual charm and was a brilliant conversationalist. He took a very great interest in his people, both from the humanitarian and from the cultural point of view. Both personally and through the Friedenwald Foundation which he had organized for the purpose, he contributed considerable amounts of money to advance Hebrew and Jewish education, and to assist meritorious refugee scholars. Through his wide circle of non-Jewish friends he was able to exert influence again and again on behalf of his people, always from a sound viewpoint, correctly assessing the situation and carefully choosing the moment to move. Had he enjoyed good health his influence in Jewish circles would undoubtedly have been very considerable.

It was the writer's good fortune to have been closely associated, in the service of the American Jewish Committee, with Dr. Friedenwald, from December, 1908, until his resignation in 1913, and to have maintained friendly personal relations from that time to Dr. Friedenwald's death. The writer has always felt that he was under obligation to Dr. Friedenwald for a strict but kindly training in executive and editorial duties, and for his sympathetic interest in the writer's welfare and career throughout all the years following their relationship as master and apprentice. Though he was always exacting and often impatient, Dr. Friedenwald was just and appreciative.

His cultural interests were varied and wide, but his attachment to Jewish life and letters was stronger than all other affections. He was among those who believed that with the destruction of Tsarism in Russia, and the inauguration of the system for the protection of minorities, that form of human depravity which manifested itself in anti-Jewish persecution was bound to diminish rapidly. He was, therefore, painfully disillusioned by events in Poland and in



Rumania after World War I, and the tragedy which befell the Jews of Europe with the advent of Hitlerism filled him with indignation and grief. However, he did not despair of the future. He considered himself fortunate to live to see the turn of the tide, and the victories of the Allies renewed his hope for the ultimate triumph of justice and righteousness.

Although he was officially connected with Jewish community life for only a few years, Dr. Friedenwald has left an indelible record of achievement in his contributions to the *Publications* of the American Jewish Historical Society, to the American Jewish Year Book, and to The American Jewish Committee in its early formative years.