

# A New Menorah Phase

*The Function of the Faculty Division*

By NATHAN ISAACS

THE following address by the Chairman of the Menorah Educational Conference, at the recent Convention in New York (December, 1919), illuminates the changed conditions among the students since the founding of the first Menorah Society in 1906. To meet these changed conditions, the Menorah Convention adopted a comprehensive program of activities in which the professors and other teachers, organized in the Menorah Educational Conference, will take their part in the development of the Menorah work. A detailed report of the Convention appears in the Menorah Bulletin, copies of which may be had on request. (Address: 600 Madison Ave., New York.)

ASSUMING in my Sabbatical year the amphibious character of a Teaching Fellow, half-teacher, half-student, I am enjoying once more something of the student's outlook on the world. But it is a changed world. The twenty years that Rip Van Winkle slept did make some difference in the life of New York. But I'd lay a wager with old Rip that Jewish student life in America has moved faster and farther in the last fifteen years than Colonial life in New York did in the twenty years of his nap. To match his Revolution we have the World War as an element in the change. It is too early to describe the mark it has left on the student body or to tell whether it is an indelible mark or not—but this much is clear: when old Rip found everybody shouting for a different George in the place of the one whose fat image he had been taught to revere, his world was hardly more changed than ours has been.

War, however, is by no means the most important source of change in the fundamental conditions facing Jewish students in America. After all, the great disturbance of our time has affected personally only one generation of undergraduates—an undergraduate generation averages only three years, you must remember, or by reason of great strength, as the Psalmist says, four years. Fifteen years ago the difficulties in the way of organizing a Jewish collegiate society were almost insuperable. Today the great menace to effective work seems to be that there are too many of them. There are Jewish fraternities, sororities, students' houses, Zionist societies, synagogues and Hebrew-speaking societies, besides several other kinds *de facto* if not *de jure* limited to Jews, such as socialist clubs, social clubs, and the like. Fifteen years ago the actual numbers of Jews in American colleges were so much smaller than the corresponding numbers today as to be almost negligible. Those who did go (or rather were sent) to college were largely recruited from families of German Jews. Many of them had become pretty much deJudaized. In fact, there was even a slight tendency to deny or at least not to advertise that one was a Jew where one's whole education, his traditions, his background and his prejudices had been drawn entirely from non-Jewish sources. Today the predominant element is, of course, of eastern European origin or extraction, and the percentage equipped with a little Jewish learning, or at least acquainted with Jewish traditions, is comparatively large. In fact, some of the men in college today have really fine foundations for scholarly work in Judaism. At all

events the field for Menorah work is wonderfully fertile. Fifteen years ago there was hardly a tie between the Jewish students in a college and the nearest Jewish community. Gradually, however, there has developed a tendency on the part of the community to make much of the Jewish student on the one hand, and to exploit him on the other. He or she has been welcomed into the Jewish settlements, Sunday Schools, Junior Councils, the more or less disguised Temple auxiliary clubs, the Zionist movement, Jewish journalism, and what I might call for lack of a better term, "Jewish politics." The ecclesiastically-minded now see the importance of winning the student body for future membership in the synagogue or temple; the publishers want them among present and future subscribers to their publications; the Zionists want them to become inspired with the national ideal and also to sell shekalim; the socialists want them to spread the gospel according to Marx; the sisterhoods and councils want to provide for their future membership; the Jewish forum wants speakers. This interest of the community is good in its way, but it is not always calculated to promote academic interests. The community is more interested in defending the truth, as our Secretary would say, than in discovering it. But whatever the cause, and whatever the motives may be, fifteen years have witnessed a complete reversal of conditions in Jewish student life in the American university.

#### *The Present Stage of Menorah Work*

**L**ITTLE wonder then if the Menorah problem—the problem of furthering Jewish culture and ideals among college men and women—has passed through several stages in the meantime. It is beside my present purpose to claim for the Menorah credit for its part in the evolution of the new Jewish student body, except that I may suggest that the Menorah has been in many respects

a pioneer among Jewish student activities, such as the holding of intercollegiate conventions, the publication of a high-class journal, the arrangement of lectures open to the entire student body, the offering of prizes to encourage scholarly work, the establishment of Menorah libraries and the like. But it is a fact that by meeting some of the most apparent needs of the Jewish students the Menorah has been a participant in the creation and development of new and higher needs. In a sense, its own work, even apart from the changed surroundings in which it must function, has made some of its older immediate aims obsolete through accomplishment. In one sense, the whole initial effort has been so far successful that a new stage of Menorah work is in progress: We have succeeded in "selling" our Menorah brands to the student body, and now we must "deliver the goods!"

#### *The Need of Productive Scholarship*

**I**N the first stage of our work the problem was how to interest a scattered, disorganized, neglected and indifferent group of students in learning something about Jewish culture and ideals. Little attention was paid to the distressing fact that the goods were not in a deliverable state. The literature in existence was unfortunately either above or below the heads of college students. They could not be given the sources or the polyglot literature, nor could they get much satisfaction out of the puerile Sunday School stuff that had been turned out in English. Our first assumption, then, if we ever really made it, was all wrong: There was no ready-made body of literature, from which the newly awakened hunger for Jewish knowledge could be satisfied. Inspiration needs something to feed upon. So we had to rely for matter on our lecturers who were vaguely supposed to be steeped in the sources of Jewish lore. But here another disillusionment was in

store for us. The Jewish scholars of the country, excluding the Rabbis who, of course, as theologians, are specialists in a peculiarly limited province of learning, could be counted on the fingers of one hand. And these were men, naturally enough, who had approached Judaica through the gate of philology. Their knowledge of Jewish law, for example, was not balanced by a training in general jurisprudence. Their information on Jewish folklore one could hardly expect to be enlightened by an understanding of folklore. They stumbled over many precious fragments of archaeology, but archaeology was not their suit. It soon became apparent that if we wanted Jewish material to be at the disposal of men specializing in all the fields of academic endeavor, we should have to do two things that no other organization includes within its program: First, disabuse the minds of the academic world of the bias against Jewish studies based on the nonsensical notion that all such studies are a branch of theology; then, encourage academic men to exploit for the benefit of their specialties—jurisprudence, sociology, ethics, politics, economics, philosophy, or whatever they may be—the hitherto unnoticed treasure-house of Jewish experience. In other words, a faculty department of the Menorah is needed to guide and make effective the work of the student department.

### *The Menorah Educational Conference*

THAT Faculty Department has now been organized. It is the Menorah Educational Conference—made up of college teachers in all branches of work interested in Jewish culture and ideals. Its task is not easy. Scholarship cannot be directed mechanically. But its attention can be invited in directions into which the ordinary guides do not lead. We hope to begin our work with a careful survey of the studies heretofore made along Menorah lines by men now in American college faculties. Perhaps after the lapse of another fifteen years our successors will feel called upon to make another survey. May I not venture to prophesy that they will find the field which we now see fallow, developed and fertile and yielding a hundred-fold crop? We have no cure-all to offer for the ills that have befallen Jewry—being more concerned for the Shechina which is in Galuth than for the Galuth itself—but may we not feel that if Israel is ever to win due appreciation among the nations, that appreciation must filter down from the circles of higher learning into which the Conference is carrying the Menorah idea?

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## MENORAH EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

Faculty Division of the Intercollegiate Menorah Association  
"For the Study and Advancement of Jewish Culture and Ideals"

600 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK



OBJECT: "The object of this Conference shall be to foster and to guide Menorah Education in American colleges and universities and among university graduates and other men and women in the general community."

MEMBERSHIP: "Membership in this Conference shall be open to all college and university officers and instructors and to other persons actively interested in educational work and approved by the Membership Committee."  
(There are no membership dues.)



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