

The Presidential Address at Memphis

THE PROBLEMS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

Cyrus L. Sulzberger

In these days of many conferences, the suggestion has frequently been made that our National Conference of Jewish Charities be abandoned. It is said that our problems are the general problems and should be dealt with at the general conferences; that there is nothing specifically Jewish to warrant our segregating ourselves from the body of our fellow-citizens. The argument runs that although the peculiar nature of our clientele requires the separate existence of our own relief-giving agencies of one kind or another—owing largely to the fact that our poor are for the most part Yiddish-speaking—the underlying causes of distress are substantially the same as those with which our sister organizations have to deal and may well be discussed and studied in common with them.

If the administration of relief were the chief problem with which American Jewry is concerned the argument would be sound. Tuberculosis is non-sectarian and finds its victims without the slightest prejudice. Widowhood and orphanage have in them no taint of anti-Semitism and in these later days even correctional institutions have been called upon to open their doors and have opened them with a non-discriminating hospitality which we should like to see displayed elsewhere. Although the conditions with which we have to deal resemble, in some respects, those of our neighbors, the causes are, for the most part, widely different. Even the conditions themselves are similar only in some respects. How much of the poverty and misery of the world is due to drink and how many families have been brought to dependency because of it, is notorious. Yet an examination of the latest available reports of the relief organizations of New York, Brooklyn, Chicago, Philadelphia and Baltimore—cities containing about 75 per cent. of the Jews of the United States—shows that

OF 13,000 CASES, IN ONLY EIGHTEEN is intemperance given as the cause of distress. Considering all moral or subjective causes, that is to say, all causes where the dependent is himself responsible for his

dependency—intemperance, desertion, imprisonment, shiftlessness, and immorality—we find that in the five cities named only 10 per cent. of the 13,000 cases were brought to dependency by these causes. In the remaining 90 per cent. the causes of distress were quite beyond the control of the applicant. When this is compared with the experience of non-Jewish organizations, it becomes apparent that we have a different clientele to deal with.

The source of our problems not being chiefly in our wards, where is it? It can be named in a few words—the economic distress of Galicia; the political oppression in Roumania; and above all, the heartless persecutions in Russia. The brutal conditions which the Czar permits or imposes upon his Jewish subjects have brought to these shores more than a million refugees—despoiled and disheartened; their families disrupted and their careers destroyed.

NEVER IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY has it been called upon to receive an immigrant population quite like this. There are philosophers and peasants; doctors and draymen; lawyers and laborers; architects and artisans; merchants and mechanics; orthodox, skeptics, anarchists, conservatives, socialists—every shade of religious and political opinion, every walk of social and intellectual life. The Jews of America have welcomed this vast mass of their brethren—a number four to six times as great as those originally here to receive them—and have welcomed them gladly, although in so doing mistakes have not been avoided.

What were our mistakes? In the first place, we did not know—we could not know because we had no contact with them—the character and attainments of the strangers who were coming to us. Although of our own faith and race, they were alien to us in appearance, in speech and in customs, and we failed to disabuse our own minds of the almost universal feeling that an alien is an inferior. It was therefore with a sense of our own superiority—a sense that the facts far from justified and very often might have reversed—that we approached

the self-assumed task of leading our brethren along the paths of American development. In the next place, we allowed ourselves and them to be caught in the machinery of the industrial development which was taking place contemporaneously with the beginnings of this migration. The figures of the U. S. Census Reports show

HOW TREMENDOUS THIS DEVELOPMENT

has been since 1880, and the enormous and continuous demand for labor that has accompanied it. At the beginning of the migration the clothing industry was largely in the hands of Jews, who were glad to give employment to the refugees. The incoming Jew, eager for an opportunity to earn a livelihood, was equally glad to accept a place at a sewing machine where his duties could be easily learned, although his previous career might have been at the bar, in the practice of medicine or the teaching of religion. The result was this anomalous situation—the employer was the usual merchant with the usual merchant's outlook; the workman was frequently an incompetent workman with the outlook for a student or a philosopher. Is it surprising that friction followed? Even the best of employers in those days was too much accustomed to regard his employes as hands—a better day is dawning in that respect—whereas in point of fact these employes were far less hands than brains. The consequence was that where there

WELL MIGHT HAVE BEEN FRIENDSHIP,

a condition of antagonism arose. On the one side was the feeling that there was an ungrateful lack of appreciation of benefits conferred; on the other, the conviction of being exploited. As has been said, the needle industries, partly because they required little previous experience and partly because the employers were Jews and were ready to help their expatriated brethren, attracted a very large part of the immigration, and as a result of the conditions just described, these industries were in a constant state of warfare. Strikes, actual or threatened, were omnipresent and the turmoil was incessant.

This condition, if we stop to reflect, was not strange. The employers, although Jews themselves, were not Yiddish-speaking and

had no direct language of communication with the workmen. A system of contracting, which had long existed in this industry, easily lent itself to the use of an intermediary in the person of a Yiddish-speaking contractor, and that this system should have resulted in the sweatshop was inevitable. The employer, however high his ideals may have been, had no personal contact with the men who were actually doing his work and no immediate personal knowledge of the conditions under which it was done. His relations were entirely with the contractor from whom he exacted all that the law of supply and demand could give him. The contractor, ground down in price by the employer, in turn ground the workmen and they were crushed by the combined weight of both. From these vicious conditions, escape was found only after long continued struggle. The contracting system has not yet been abolished, but it has been very much lessened in volume and improved in character, and by the adoption of the protocol in the women's trade, not only has a method been found for redressing grievances without resort to the strike, but an

OBJECT LESSON HAS BEEN TAUGHT

to all industry showing how, with necessary modifications, as the demands of each trade may require, amicable relations between capital and labor may be maintained.

You may ask what all this has to do with the National Conference of Jewish Charities? The connection is right here. With the improved conditions in the needle industry and the increased capacity of the people to care for themselves, the problem of relief has very materially altered. The United Hebrew Charities of New York has only half the number of applicants that it had a decade or so ago, despite the fact that the population has nearly doubled in the meanwhile. The establishment and development of mutual aid societies has been an important factor in this improvement. The people have learned to care for themselves in larger degree in evil days as well as in good, and are rapidly assuming their proper status of independence and self-support. Of the present-day applicants for relief in New York, 75 per cent. have been more than five years in the country and many of them are a legacy from that earlier unhappy pe-

riod—a legacy of tuberculosis and premature widowhood brought about by the overwork and underpay of those days. Of the vast sum expended by New York more than half is needed for widows and sufferers by tuberculosis, and nearly half the remainder for other forms of sickness.

The demand upon the relief societies today is as great as it is because the population is large in numbers and for the most part poor; the cost of living is high, and the laudable desire is to provide adequately as far as may be for those who are dependent. The

REAL PROBLEM

facing the Jews of America, however, is not material relief. Our duty is to teach the newcomer the ways of American life and to aid him in adapting himself thereto without losing his contact with Judaism. On these words "without losing his contact with Judaism" too much stress cannot be laid. Forcibly uprooted as he has been from his native environment, if he lose his religious grasp as well as all his other accustomed surroundings, he will veritably become a stranger in a strange land, having neither customs nor morals to sustain him. It is for us, therefore, to map out lines of constructive development, so that we may enable our brethren from abroad to continue in this country lives they have been accustomed to live—lives of self-respect, independence and uprightness.

This duty, resting upon the Jews of America, of developing constructive methods of philanthropy, brought into existence a chain of institutions unique in social work at the time of their inauguration and some of them still alone in the field of philanthropic endeavor. Such organizations as the *Gemilath Chasidim* or Free Loan Societies were instituted by the Russian Jews themselves. There were no American precedents for them, but they were copied from similar institutions abroad. The Educational Alliances which, under one name or another, are found in every large Jewish community, and modifications of the Social Settlement and their success is to be measured by their ability to reach parent as well as child and prevent the breach which is so frequent between the product of the old world environment and that of the new.

Technical and Manual Training Schools have been an important factor in developing high-class mechanics and enabling them to find a useful and profitable place in the community.

The Baron de Hirsch Trade School is a model institution founded by the Baron de Hirsch Fund. Here young men are given a course of trade instruction lasting only six months, and it is

REMARKABLE WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED in so short a period of intensive instruction. Wood-working, metal-working, house and sign painting, carpentry and kindred pursuits are so well taught that in half a year young men who, six months before knew not even the names of the tools of their trade, are sufficiently expert to be first-class helpers, and are put well along the road of self-support.

Two other important benefactions made possible by the generosity of Baron de Hirsch are the Industrial Removal Office and the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society. The activities of the former of these organizations are sufficiently known to the Conference to require no detailed description. Newly arrived immigrants, coming in the first instance to New York, and failing there to place themselves in occupations suitable for them, are sent by this office to all sections of the country: 1,555 towns and cities, situated in every State in the Union have received the 65,000 persons who, in the twelve years of its existence, have been thus distributed. The generous co-operation of the interior communities has been a condition precedent to this successful work.

Intelligent analysis shows that there is no immigration problem in this country, our sole problem in that connection being that of distribution. If the whole country were populated no more densely than the State of New Jersey, it would contain a population of 1,000,000,000. What we are really facing is not too many people, but too many in one spot and not enough in another. A few years ago the Government established a Division of Information and Distribution, which, however, has been of little value because its possibilities have not been realized; or if realized, have remained undeveloped. When it is seen what can be

done by a private organization, hampered in financial limitations and confining itself to one class of immigrants, the achievements which the Government might accomplish can hardly be estimated. Of the 65,000 persons sent away by the Industrial Removal Office, 33,000 are bread-winners, the remainder being their wives and children. These thousands of workers are annually adding to the wealth of the community an average of not less than \$500 per year, or, in the aggregate,

MORE THAN \$16,000,000

annually. All of this vast sum, which is not consumed at the point of production must, of course, be handed over to the railroad companies for transportation to the markets. If the managers of the railways had vision they would see it to be in their own interest to transport immigrants from the seaboard to the interior at a nominal rate of fare. The immigrant would be carried but once, but his products would give them business year after year. A man without means at the seaboard and a job without a man in the interior cannot, under present conditions, be brought together. It is in the power of the railways to serve themselves, as well as the man who works and the man who employs, by bringing the man to the job. The Interstate Commerce Commission, if necessary, should be invoked for permissive or compelling rulings to bring about this end.

Most important, perhaps, of the constructive activities is the agricultural work which is being done. A generation ago a Jewish farmer in America was a rarity. True, before the Revolutionary War, one family was farming in Westchester County in New York, and scattered Jewish planters were to be found in the South; but these were

RARE EXCEPTIONS,

and remained exceptions until within a comparatively recent period. To encourage farming among the Jews various agencies are at work. The Agricultural School at Woodbine, New Jersey, established by the Baron de Hirsch Fund, and the National Farm School at Doylestown, Pennsylvania, which owes its existence to Rev. Dr. Krauskopf, are two institutions giving instruction in agricultural pursuits—the former in ordinary farming and the other in more

specialized fields. In Chicago a number of public-spirited men organized the Jewish Agriculturist Aid Society of America and provided the funds for aiding Jews to become farmers. Early in the Russian immigration the Baron de Hirsch Fund made the experiment of settling some families on abandoned farms in New England and this was the beginning of the Jewish agricultural movement in America. It was found that there was enough to be done in this way to justify the existence of a special society for the purpose, and a few years later the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society was formed, its funds being provided by the Jewish Colonization Society and the Baron de Hirsch Fund. Its main office is in New York, and there is a branch in Chicago, established since the discontinuance of the Chicago Society. Its clients are to be found in thirty-five States of the Union and it has outstanding more than \$1,000,000.

The dominant economic fact of the past two decades has been the cityward trend of population. The growth of industries in cities has made there a demand for labor, the reward of which is both more rapid and more secure than on the farm. As a result our several recent census reports have shown a disproportionate growth of urban population. In the face of this tendency, with the farmers of New England abandoning their homesteads and taking up lands in the West and the sons of native farmers moving to the cities, it required both vision and faith to undertake the relocation upon the soil of a portion of the people who, for hundreds of years, had been divorced from it. The vision was true and

THE FAITH JUSTIFIED

as is shown by the thousands of Jewish farmers now successfully following their calling and adding their quota to the all too small food supply of the country. The worst result of the city trend already mentioned is not the increased congestion of cities. It is the reduced per capita production of foodstuffs and the consequent increase in living cost. In the remedying of this evil the Jewish farmers are doing their share, and, incidentally, they are reaping the benefits naturally accruing to them under the circumstances.

The success which has attended the farming movement among the Jews has prompted well-meaning persons in all parts of the country to endeavor to stimulate it by all kinds of ill-considered schemes of colonization. Many seem to think that the solution of all or most of our problems is to be found in agriculture, and without stopping to reckon the cost, either in money or in misery, they are ready to encourage every plan in that direction. The history of Jewish colonization in the United States is a

HISTORY OF FAILURE.

As long back as the early eighties of the last century Emma Lazarus sang the praises of a Jewish colony in Texas. Her poem is the only reminder left of that colony. The early established colonies of New Jersey, which were partly agricultural and partly industrial, have been maintained at an expense which it would be utterly impossible to duplicate, and are only now, after thirty years, beginning to approach self-support. A colony was established at Arpin, Wisconsin, in 1904 for eighteen families. At one time it had fourteen. They all or nearly all left. Today there are six families. This experiment cost the society more than \$25,000, besides what it cost the people themselves. The same year an experiment was tried at Tyler, Texas. It was a dismal failure. Happyville Colony in South Carolina was happy only in its name. Established in 1905, it was eventually sold out under foreclosure. In 1909 ten Chicago families were settled at Waycross, Georgia—all gone. In 1910 ten families settled at Flora, Illinois—two remain. In 1912 thirty-five families from St. Louis established the Ida Straus Colony at Milline, Texas. Six families are now settled there with very doubtful prospects. The latest attempt is that now being made in Utah. Its enthusiastic friends predict great things—the enthusiastic friends of colonization always do. Those who shape their judgment more on business experience than on enthusiasm are not so favorably impressed. They prefer to adopt the policy which President Wilson has called "watchful waiting." They know that

\$1,500 IS THE ABSOLUTELY MINIMUM sum with which a family can be placed on a farm with any hope of success, and that

by no means every man desirous of farming can succeed in the calling. Both physical and temperamental qualities are needed—after financial requirements have been cared for. To change from the crowded city tenements to the wide spaces of the open may seem bliss to us, but to him who has been accustomed to close neighborliness of the one, the other is apt to present the loneliness of the desert. The little story of Ardelia in Arcady who, being sent to the country for a summer outing, pined for the noise and distraction of the city, is too often the story of the ghetto dweller transferred to a farm. Hard as is the work of a sewing machine operator it is quite a different kind of hardship from that which the farmer has to bear. Many a man, after submitting to the hard labor that his work called for, has abandoned his farm in discouragement when his wife wearied of the solitary and unaccustomed life she was called upon to lead or when drought or hail or frost destroyed his crop. The sweat of his brow brought him no reward and unless he be of extraordinary moral fiber only one thing will hold him to the farm under such conditions. That one thing is the fact that his own money—the savings of years of toil—is buried in his soil. If he be the ward of philanthropy without a stake of his own involved, it is almost certain that he will not persevere.

This is no mere theory. Experience in instances enough to make it sure has established the rule. It is nothing short of a calamity to any man to remove him from the city to the land if he fails of success, for not alone does he lose his time and his substance, but his wandering foot

MUST AGAIN MOVE

in a new direction. The home he had established in the city is broken up; the new home he established in the country is a failure. Older, more tired and more discouraged, he must anew gird up his loins for contest with the world. The story of the exile of modern Israel is sad enough. Let us in our good-natured optimism not be guilty of adding to its pathos.

An encouraging feature of the agricultural development is the desire for co-operation which has developed through the Federation of Jewish Farmers, its credit

unions; its co-operative fire insurance company; its purchasing bureau, and its other evidences of a community spirit. While, of course, this spirit was stimulated by the society, it could not have been successfully established unless the people themselves had been ready for it. Through this Federation there is being established a sense of self-reliance and a power of co-ordination which are rich with promise in other fields.

For many years one of the theories to which we have steadfastly clung has been that the Jews from Eastern Europe would not, or could not, act in unison and that they were unwilling to accept any leadership and were temperamentally incapable of organization. There was much to give reason to this belief. Prompt to form a *Chevra* as soon as the necessary number were to be found in a given community, they were equally prompt to form a second as soon as the number had grown, so that, instead of having one society with some strength we had two and twenty-two, each struggling with its weakness. To be sure, the more societies, the more officers, and the more officers the more vanity to be gratified. It was not, however, solely or even chiefly vanity that prompted the multiplicity of societies. The *Anshe this town* and the *Anshe* that felt that they had more in common with the men of their own native place, and it took many years of education and experience to teach them—as it has taken an equal number of years to teach us—that in this country all of our Jewish interests must be regarded

AS COMMON INTERESTS

and that here we are all American Jews, whether born in Russia, Galicia, Germany or on this soil. It would be idle to claim that this lesson has been completely learned but that something has been accomplished in this direction is shown by the latest step in the march of communal progress in the development of the *Kehillah* movement.

Of the *Kehillahs* that have been organized, the most important—both because it was the first and because it is in the largest community—is that in New York. The work that has been done by this *Kehillah*, under the inspiring leadership of Dr. J. L. Magnes, need not here be described in de-

tail. Its greatest practical achievement has been to awaken at least a part of the community to a sense of the necessity for religious education, and the Bureau of Education which it has organized under the supervision of Dr. Benderly will go far toward removing, from the next generation, the stigma resting upon the present of ignorance of its history and traditions. The greatest moral achievement of the *Kehillah* has been to unite in one body representatives of all shades of Jewish opinion and all classes of Jews. At its annual conventions, discussions are carried on in Russian Yiddish, in Galician Yiddish and in the most polished English. Ghetto dwellers with side curls and wearing their hats sit beside our leading philanthropists and financiers. Rabbis of reform congregations and the most orthodox rabbis in the land are colleagues, and radical labor leaders and their antipodal employers here meet on a footing of equality. What all this means for

THE FUTURE SOLIDARITY

of the Jewish community can hardly be foretold. This, at least, may be ventured. In those communities where a Federation of Charities has been established, it has not been found possible to federate all under one head, but those organizations controlled by the German Jews and their descendants been combined into one Federation, and those of the Russian, Roumanian and Galician Jews into another. New York has been a laggard in the matter of Federation—so much a laggard as to merit the reproaches which have been heaped upon it. I venture to prophesy, however, that when we do get a Federation in New York—and we are bound to—we shall not see the incongruous situation existing in other cities of two organizations perpetuating differences that have no right to exist. When we get our Federation, thanks to the brotherly spirit engendered by the *Kehillah*, we shall have one organization embracing rich and poor, reform and orthodox, native and foreign born. The brotherhood of Israel has always been a maxim. Unfortunately, in America it has at times been little else. The time is not far distant when it will be an established reality. The dawn of that day is already visible.