

THE B'NAI B'RITH HILLEL FOUNDATIONS— RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

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IT is now almost a quarter of a century since a small band of devoted leaders, Jewish and Christian, gave birth to an idea, which has become one of the most dynamic forces in the American Jewish Community. Champaign, Illinois, was the locale, and the University of Illinois, the center of a youth-serving experiment which B'nai B'rith has now developed into a national and international influence. When the first Hillel Foundation was launched in 1923, it represented the combined dreams and hopes of a young Rabbi, Benjamin Frankel, of a great Christian teacher, Prof. Chauncey Baldwin, and of a progressive fraternal order, the B'nai B'rith.

But birth, as we all know, represents a period of pain and struggle. There were many, both on and off the campus, who regarded the new movement with indifference, fear and even suspicion. There were some, both within and without B'nai B'rith, who looked upon college youth as a lost generation and believed that a Jewish college program is impossible of realization. But the visionaries persisted, and their dreams were translated into the lives and careers of thousands of Jewish youth who have been influenced by the program and work of Hillel.

What has the movement wrought in American Jewish life and what are its gains and achievements? A perspective, born of almost 25 years of service to Israel and Torah, will prove a helpful guide. What impresses the objective observer, at first glance, is the phenomenal growth of this program in terms of number of units, personnel and student bodies served. Under the gifted and inspiring leadership of Dr. A. L. Sachar, the National Director, the Hillel movement can now boast of over 149 units, both Foundations and Counselorships, located in nearly every institution of higher learning in America and Canada. In fact, at the height of the army and navy program in the colleges last year, Hillel was operating on 141 campuses, serving a constituency of 12,000 men in uniform in addition to over 50,000 civilian students. The War Service program, which Hillel is still sponsoring in many of its units, represents one of the brightest and most significant chapters in its long history of service to the American Jewish public. Beginning with this Fall, the Hillel program will be reaching nigh unto 60,000 Jewish students—more than half the total Jewish enrollment in American and Canadian institutions of higher learning.

But figures in themselves are not always significant. Let us scrutinize Hillel more carefully in terms of objectives, program and techniques. What is at once apparent is that here is a movement which is uncompromisingly dedicated to positive Judaism, without any of the divisive factors so unfortunately

present in adult Jewish life. The Hillel Foundation is in fact a Jewish community or Kehillah, transplanted to the college or university campus. Its motto may well be, "nothing Jewish shall be foreign to us." Its broad religious, cultural and social program embraces practically every type of activity found in the home community. Its democratically elected student council serves as a board of directors in charge of the projects and departments. On many campuses, a Hillel Cabinet, composed of representatives from fraternities, sororities, rooming houses, and dormitories is in fact the campus Jewish Community, dealing with and planning all undertakings and programs of campus-wide Jewish interest. Within the Hillel scheme, students of varying Jewish viewpoints and philosophies have ample opportunity for full participation and expression. The only requirement is that they learn to respect the viewpoint of their neighbors and work with them in the cause of *k'lal Yisrael*. Hillel's quarter of a century's history has dynamically demonstrated that Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, Zionist and non-Zionist, believer and skeptic can all meet together and work unitedly in one common organization. This in itself is an achievement which has already contributed much to the pattern of Jewish life without.

THE most dramatic demonstration of Hillel's contribution to Jewish unity is shown in the very choice and selection of the Hillel Directors themselves. Here is one of the few areas in Jewish life outside of the Chaplaincy where orthodox, conservative and reform Rabbis work together in a common cause of Jewish educational and religious leadership. Hillel directors are selected from all theological seminaries and from every field of Jewish thought. Once assigned to a campus, however, they are charged with the preservation and expression of all phases of Judaism and not with the propagation of a particular preference or ism.

That Hillel students can translate their Jewish loyalties into concrete and dynamic human service is amply demonstrated by the community welfare projects of the Foundations. This year, for example, close to \$50,000 have already been raised in student-organized and fostered United Jewish Campaigns, devoted to the major Jewish causes and philanthropies. The Hillel Refugee Student program, now in its tenth year of outstanding service, has sent forth into American life and the armed services scores of brilliant foreign students who have more than repaid their adopted land for its generous hospitality. The significance of this typical Hillel service was recently dramatically illustrated when word came back to America

that one of the legal experts associated with the armies of liberation in Italy was a former Hillel Refugee Student at an American campus. His challenging assignment was to work out the details for the restoration of citizenship and property to Jews in the liberated sections of the Italian peninsula!

What the Hillel movement has meant to countless other Jewish young people who have come under its influence, cannot be adequately measured in figures and statistics. It would be an idle boast, perhaps, to claim that Hillel has already succeeded in inspiring a religious revival on the campus. Nor can we proclaim that all Jewish collegians now return to their homes and communities completely prepared and informed Jewishly. The same corrosive forces which we are fighting in Jewish life back home are also present on the campus, perhaps to a stronger degree. Add to that the so-called rebelliousness of youth and the typical problems of later adolescence, and you have a challenge which commands the most patient and skillful leadership. It is possible to say, however, that Hillel has succeeded in restoring Jewish self-respect to countless thousands of Jewish students, that it has brought Jewish knowledge and dignity to innumerable others and that it has sent forth into American Jewish communities, large and small, Hillel Alumni who have already assumed commanding positions of leadership and responsibility. Were one to call the roll of American Jewish leaders, both lay and professional, who have been Hillel trained and influenced, we should have a list which would be most striking and impressive. Here, unquestionably, the Hillel movement has been conscious of the admonition of the gentle sage after whom its work is named: "al tifrosh min ha-tzibur," 'do not separate thyself from the community or congregation.'

But there is another important phase of the Hillel program which the passing of the years has made even more significant. Hillel today is one of the most important agencies in American Jewish life for interpreting and expounding the message of Israel in one of the most critical areas in our national life. That we already have, in a little under a quarter of a century, 120 or more trained and informed teachers of Judaism at American colleges and universities is an achievement the import of which grows with the passing years. Let us in America never forget that in some lands, the European University not only was the academic center of anti-Semitism and pseudo-racism, but also, that in too many instances, both students and professors were active purveyors of hate and leaders of agitation. The betrayal by the intellectuals is one of the tragic chapters in the collapse of European civilization. Poland, Germany, Austria, Rumania, and other benighted centers gave birth not only to dangerous demagogues but also to their ideological supporters in the centers of higher education. The interfaith role of Hillel at American universities has motivated more than one Jewish leader to assert that we should be justified in maintaining Hillel on

the campus even if there were no sizeable Jewish student bodies.

WHAT a trained Jewish leader and an active religious and cultural program can achieve on the campus, has been graphically demonstrated in innumerable ways during the past 23 or more years. Personal contacts with faculty and administration, interfaith meetings and seminars, interfaith prizes and scholarships, Hillel libraries and forums represent but a few of the day by day impacts of Hillel on university life. On practically every campus where Hillel is represented, the Director is constantly engaged in lectures before classes and seminars, in talks before church and civic groups and in the planning and arrangement of conferences and discussions dealing with the basic ideals of Jew and Christian and their application to the broad complex of American democratic life. But even more has been accomplished where Hillel courses are a regular part of the university's intellectual and curricular life. The Illinois Hillel credit courses, for example, reached during peace time an average of 500 students a year, of which number at least half were non-Jewish. Many of these Christian "Hillel Alumni" are today active ministers and teachers, civic leaders and, in some cases, important heads of federal and governmental departments. The high educational calibre and training of the Hillel Directors have won for them and for Jewish life generally a high position of prestige and respect. Here in America the Jewish community cannot be accused of negligence in allowing the agents of hate and the purveyors of pseudo-racism to poison the wells of American education.

Born in balmy days of the booming twenties, the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations in their first quarter of a century have already passed through a major depression, have faced the disintegrating effects of a second world war and are now preparing for an even greater role of service to and with the returning veterans and the post-war student bodies. That Hillel has been able not only to survive these crises but even to grow and multiply in the face of difficulties, is a striking tribute to its inherent strength and vitality as well as to the wisdom and generosity of its parent organization, B'nai B'rith.

The post-war period will find American Jewish life and American life generally in a period of trial and crisis. The foreign enemies of civilization will have been conquered and overthrown. But at home, the domestic breeders of discord will still be busy. Anti-Semitism, we all know, has taken root in an alarming degree even in fair and free America. The problems resulting from demobilization, reconversion and partial unemployment will leave ripples and, in some cases, waves of insecurity and discontent. The demagogues will try to capitalize on this uncertainty for their own strength and glorification. That their imitators and followers may also appear on the cam-

pus is an eventuality for which American Jewry must be prepared.

But our greatest challenge will be the returned veterans, both young men and young women. The shattering experiences through which they will have passed will leave them in need of expert guidance, counsel and religious and cultural inspiration. They will need a friendly voice and guiding hand in the difficult period of transition from war to peace. Hillel, in its 149 units and in the new branches which will open with the passing years, is now preparing and

will always be ready intelligently to serve them.

The B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations on the eve of their second quarter century of service are facing a period of even greater opportunity and more significant service. The trials of both peace and war will have been traversed. The fears and skepticisms of its early days will have been dissipated. Tried by the acid test of a generation of college youth and their older contemporaries, Hillel is here to stay, a loyal servant of "k'lal Yisrael" and of the hopes and dreams of American Judaism.