

**THE
ELCHANITE
1927**



TEN YEARS of the TALMUDICAL ACADEMY

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Ten years ago, during the last week in December 1916, I first became acquainted with the Yeshiva and its new high-school, the Talmudical Academy. My friend, Dr. Israel Kliegler who is now chief health officer of Palestine and Professor of bacteriology in the University of Palestine, was then the instructor of biology in the Yeshiva high-school. In order that he might be able to attend the meeting of the National Academy for the Advancement of Science then held in Philadelphia, he asked me to take his place in the Yeshiva high-school during the week of his absence. A month later, February first, 1917, Dr. Kliegler resigned his position as instructor of biology. The late Dr. Solomon T. H. Hurwitz, the first principal and beloved leader of the Talmudical Academy, offered me the position he had relinquished.

It is often said that first impressions are lasting ones. I shall never forget the impression the Yeshiva made upon me the first time I entered its portals. I had expected to see a large structure situated in an environment conducive to uninterrupted and concentrated study and provided with all the resources which an institution like the Rabbinical College of America might be expected to possess. Instead, the directions which I had received led me to a modest-looking, unimpressive, little brick building, situated in the heart of the clatter and noise of the crowded East Side, of 9-11 Montgomery Street.

It was not long before I became acquainted with the other instructors in the school—there were only five others, including the principal, Messrs. Stern, Rosengarten and Lieberman and Dr. Barcarat—and with all the thirty odd students then attending the school. I must confess that the earnestness, not to mention the ease and facility with which they grasped the subject

that I taught (a condition so different from that prevailing in the public high school) fascinated me from the start. My students and I were soon fast friends and a troop of them used to accompany me to the station every evening, asking questions or seeking advice or offering information gratis.

Thus the school went on without much excitement until the fall of 1918. My one small class had grown to two classes, and at my suggestion a laboratory for twenty-four was fitted out in the basement of the building. During the summer I had gathered much biologic material at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass., where I had carried on research work, and when I came back we had a small but fairly well equipped supply room, including even a compound microscope.

The year 1918 was the year of the devastating influenza epidemic and I soon heard that Dr. Bacarat, our French teacher, was seriously ill with pneumonia. A little later, the news reached us that our beloved saintly principal, Dr. Hurwitz, was also dangerously ill. Our ranks were increased by the coming of Dr. Steinbach from Johns Hopkins to share the teaching of English with Dr. Hurwitz, the addition of Dr. Winkler brought us a good teacher in Latin and German, while Mr. Heller had come to take care of the artistic proclivities of our young Michael Angelos.

My surprise was deeply commingled with grief when I was summoned by the head of the institution, Dr. Bernard Revel, and with tears in his voice, he informed me that Dr. Hurwitz's illness had taken a turn for the worse and that he was not expected to recover and that I was to acquaint myself with the office details, preparatory to assuming charge of the Talmudical Academy as acting-principal. Soon after, in Jan.,

1919, Dr. Hurwitz passed away. His spirit will last as a treasured memory among the early pupils of the Talmudical Academy.

The school had grown and I found myself in charge of some eighty odd students and seven teachers. Among these was an increasing number of teachers drawn from the public high school faculties. The office administration and routine were completely reorganized in conformity with the practice which obtains in the modern, up-to-date high schools and the equipment and facilities improved so as to meet the requirements of a modern school house. The results of the Regents examinations proved that we were doing work of a very high calibre, fully equal to that done in the larger and better equipped city high schools. Visitors from Albany came to inspect our work from time to time and, our school was successively recognized as a Junior, Middle and Senior high school. By that time our first class, a doughty band of five, was ready to graduate, and we wondered what Albany's attitude would be. Would we be recognized as a full-fledged high school empowered to grant diplomas admitting our graduates to the colleges? After many anxious days during which we were inspected and examined and reexamined word came to us, Nov. 24, 1919, that we were recognized as a complete high school and authorized to grant our own diplomas, entitled to state scholarships and to academic and college entrance Regents diplomas on the same basis as the city high schools. Accordingly, our first class of five was graduated in June, 1919 and among their number there was one winner of a state scholarship.

This happy event served as a spur and stimulus to interested Jewry. Students from all sides began to apply for admission, and we soon found ourselves outgrowing our crowded quarters. We moved over into our present building in 1921, in order to accommodate the ever growing school which now numbered over two hundred students. In the new building, as in the old, the school continued to expand, growing in the course of two years, from two hundred to four hundred. Parallel with the growth in numbers there has been a growth in effectiveness of teaching in the

spirit of cooperation, in efficiency of administration so that to-day the Talmudical Academy is known far and wide for the splendid academic training it affords its students.

During all these years the thing that has impressed me most is the spirit and the idealism which pervades the institution and particularly its students. Contrasted with the boys of the city high schools one finds much to commend in our boys. In comparing them with those of the city high schools one must take into consideration the many handicaps they have to contend with. Many of them are but recent arrivals in this country, the language of which is foreign to them. Most of them come from homes where English is spoken imperfectly if at all. Moreover, there is the long day from 9 A. M. to 7 P. M., during which our boys carry double the burden of the average high school boy combining with the Talmud and Hebrew work of the morning hours, the secular studies of the afternoon.

And yet in spite of these handicaps, perhaps because of them, it would be difficult to find a student body among whom there is developed to such a high degree the intense seriousness of purpose, singleness of aim and application and devotion to their studies both religious and secular. With them, unlike their brothers and sisters in the public and private high-schools, education is not so much a training or making a living but a training for life; to live the lives of Jews conscious and mindful of their heritage and the culture of the past as well as that of the present.

It is almost superfluous to mention again the high achievements of our students in scholarship. The records from year to year demonstrate the high standing that is maintained by the students of the Academy. The Regents examinations are passed with averages, and by a percentage of the pupils, that exceed those of most of the city high-schools. Another interesting indication of comparative achievement may be secured by observing the records of those graduates of the various high-schools who have sought admission by entrance examinations into the College of the City of New York. Invariably, the graduates of our high-school make

a better showing than those of any other high-school. It is rare that even one of our graduates fails to pass the entrance examinations, whereas the average for all applicants is about twenty percent passing. State scholarships awarded on the basis of universal competitive state examinations also indicate that our boys are among the best. The records for the past five or six years show that from fifteen to twenty percent of our graduates have won such scholarships as compared to from one to five percent for the average city high-schools. In general, our scholastic records is such as to justify the hope that in the years to come our graduates will reap a rich harvest from the seeds here sowed.

Thus the first ten years of our life have passed and we now stand expectant and hopeful on the threshold of the second decade of our existence as a high-school in the home of the Torah in America, the Yeshiva. We have reached the turning point and we are looking forward with anxious eyes toward our large new home on the heights where, amidst healthier surroundings, with splendidly equipped and furnished buildings, with a larger staff of teachers who will be able to give their full time to our

institution, our combined message of Judaism and the modern world will reach a larger number of our youth.

In this development you, the graduates of 1927, will play no little part. By word and through living example you will carry to your communities the spirit and the message of the Yeshiva. You will come to the life outside the schoolroom with an equipment that is your unique power with the combined values of the ideals and traditions of our eternal faith and the contributions of modern culture. You are the ripening fruit of the orchard of the Yeshiva by which its work will be judged and through which its ideals shall be perpetuated, and you will find the harmony of a full Jewish consciousness and a rich American life. With you go our wishes and our hopes and the knowledge that you will achieve their realization, that you and those of the Talmudical Academy and the Yeshiva College who come after you will carry into manhood and through life for a more rounded, better life the influence you have drawn from your years with the Talmudical Academy and the Yeshiva.

