

## DR. DAVID DE SOLA POOL ON "IMMIGRATION OF LEVANTINE JEWS"

Abraham Solomon

New York

The increase in the immigration of Levantine Jews to the United States has called the attention of communal workers to their needs. While they have not come in significantly large numbers, still it is estimated that throughout the United States they total somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000. Already, however, there are indications that their settlement in this country is attended with difficulties, and that their economic and social status has not proved as high as that of our other immigrant classes. This fact can be accounted for by:

(1) Their inability to speak any language current in the United States.

(2) In the majority of instances their lack of a trade.

(3) Their peculiar religious customs and their peculiar psychology, which invites segregation and isolation.

The New York community, where the majority of the Levantine Jews have settled, has grappled with these obstacles and there is no doubt that its activity thus far has done much to diminish their ill-effects. But it is now conceded that the problem involved is a large one and that more aggressive measures will have to be taken if our Levantine brethren are to be favorably assimilated into American life. Unfortunately, this problem is aggravated by our lack of definite information on the entire question. We have no exact and accurate knowledge of their number or their occupation; we do not know how prevalent diseases are among them, although of late tuberculosis has made inroads into their population; and we have little collated data of their manner of living and housing conditions. How strong the need for such a survey is has been emphasized in the admirable paper written by David de Sola Pool, entitled "The Immigration of Levantine Jews," and read at the National Conference of Jewish Charities, Memphis, held in May. We propose to review this paper and to show its constructive value.

Dr. Pool is happily endowed with an interesting style and his description of the

temperament of the Levantine Jew is illuminating. His paper is thorough and adequate as far as existing data permits; it is to be regretted that on many important phases of the question speculation must be substituted for knowledge. Dr. Pool, however, has exercised scientific caution and there are only a few instances where he has deviated from this course.

He starts out by defining ethnically the Levantine Jew. The Levant, he states, includes the Eastern Mediterranean and the coasts of Syria, Asia and Egypt, and the regions between Italy and the Euphrates. The language most frequently spoken by the Levantine Jews is Ladino. Of their mental characteristics and traits, he says that they are especially noted for a sense of dignity and pride. This sensitiveness is apt to conceal their real feelings, and so, to the stranger, they seem either unusually self-sufficient or subtle. But their most exclusive tendency is shown in their religious life. They regard themselves as belonging to a different branch of Israel's tree; they adhere to the Sephardic customs and observations which are distinctly "individual." While this persistence to their heritage is laudable in the highest degree, it, nevertheless, forms a barrier between them and Jews of different nativity. Dr. Pool expresses the hope that time will do away with these "prejudices."

The Levantine Jewish community in New York has shown its realization of the need for organization. As yet their efforts along this line have been tentative. The very first form of organization affected has been a burial society composed of a group coming from one city or district. Such society conducts a synagogue, and there are quite a few small and struggling synagogues which as yet are not united. In addition there is a lack of qualified rabbinic leaders which is responsible, to a certain extent, for a laxity, especially in connection with marriages. Dr. Pool recommends the procuring of a religious authority qualified to perform rabbinic functions.

As regards the educational status of Levantine Jews, it must be said that they show a higher degree of illiteracy (24.2 per cent) as compared with the average per cent of illiteracy of all Jewish immigrants (20.8 per cent). These figures are given by him and while the former is undoubtedly correct, the percentage of total Jewish illiteracy for the last year, according to the last annual report of the Commissioner General of Immigration, is 16.4 per cent. While the rate of illiteracy among Levantine Jews who emigrate here is relatively high, nevertheless, Dr. Pool claims that the standard of education among these settlers is considerably higher than that of the countries from which they come. It would have been interesting in this connection if he could have indicated what that standard was for purposes of a more exact comparison. If reference is made to the last report of the Commissioner General of Immigration, it will be seen that the illiteracy of Turkish (non-Jewish) male immigrants is more than 50 per cent. Therefore, it would seem that the illiteracy of Levantine Jewish immigrants is less than the general illiteracy of immigrants from Turkey, and would seem to substantiate his contention that the standard of their education is higher than that of the countries from which they come. To overcome this factor of illiteracy, he suggests the need for special classes in English and civics conducted by teachers who understand either Ladino, Greek or Arabic. He points out that in the existing schools for teaching English to foreigners the teachers are not familiar with the languages of the Ladino Jews and hence an antipathy is unconsciously formed between teacher and pupil. For that reason the attendance of the Levantine Jews of these schools has dwindled to a negligible number.

Coming to the economic status of the Levantine Jews, Dr. Pool says that a large proportion of them are without any special trade and are unemployable, except at unskilled labor of the lowest grade. They have consequently been forced into such occupations as peddling, shoepolishing, cloakroom attendants, cigarette-makers and other miscellaneous pursuits. Even in the case of those who have a definite trade,

they find it extremely difficult to procure employment because of their inability to speak either English or Yiddish. Necessarily, their prevalence in the miscellaneous occupations means meager earnings, which in turn causes undesirable housing conditions. There is miserable overcrowding, although the homes are clean. In Cincinnati, for example, "it has been estimated by Mr. Maurice B. Hexter that there are twenty-seven persons per sleeping room" (*sic*). In New York City the figure is "probably higher," although no canvass has been made. Overcrowding is found even when the family is small, because the overplus of single men produces a large class of boarders. Such congestion injuriously affects the health of the Levantine Jews and breeds diseases that are directly traceable to insanitary conditions. Equally serious are the undesirable social and moral conditions created by the unemployment of a large portion of the Levantine Jews. The Oriental cafés where the unemployed congregate are a social menace. Idleness and gambling are thereby encouraged and these cafés are made rendezvous for exploiters and for the vicious element which infests a large city. Another cause for disquiet is the great preponderance of men over women among Levantine Jews. Dr. Pool is confident that time will remedy this disproportion because whole families are joining male pioneers and in illustration of this he points to the figures compiled by the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society which show that during 1913 the number of female immigrants among Levantine Jews increased to 40 per cent of the total.

It is but natural that all deleterious influences of the kind described should result in forcing a number of Levantine Jews into dependency. It is true that only a prolonged unemployment, sickness and dire destitution cause them to have recourse to philanthropy. And it is unfortunate, as Dr. Pool points out, that the relief agencies cannot properly understand them. Aside from the fact that their language is alien, their pride makes it difficult to establish confidence.

Dr. Pool devotes a special portion of his paper to the distribution of Levantine Jews throughout the country. He quotes figures

of the immigration report, which show that in 1913, for example, 2222 Levantine Jews emigrated to this country. This figure is taken from the records of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. He points out that there are nuclei of Levantine Jewish communities in Seattle, Portland, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Coming now to the constructive recommendations proposed by Dr. Pool to meet the problems outlined, he suggests:

(1) A survey of conditions obtaining among Levantine Jews in every city in this country where they have settled.

(2) The recognition of the indefensible right of these Jews to create their own religious institutions; and the procuring of a spiritual leader for their community.

(3) In the field of social service effort should be directed toward the formation of clubs and socials for every legitimate purpose—clubs philanthropic, literary, social, dramatic, musical or educational and civic.

(4) The efficient teaching of English with the aid of teachers who understand the language of the Levantine Jews.

(5) A central building for the use of Levantine Jews for hygienic, educational, social, moral and religious uplift. In that building could be held classes in English and in American citizenship, classes in hygiene and better living conditions, a local aid bureau, an employment office, and a large and efficient Talmud Torah.

(6) Distribution of Levantine Jews in every section of the country where they can procure employment and where the housing and living conditions will prove more desirable than in New York. This is a far-sighted recommendation. In discussing it reference should be made to the attempt in this direction made by the Industrial Removal Office during the last three or four years. The main obstacle encountered by that office in affecting a distribution has been the disinclination of the interior communities to cope with the problem presented by Levantine Jews because of their inability to speak either English or Yiddish. While fully appreciating the fact that this handicap makes their absorption more difficult, yet participation in the problem should not be denied on

that account. The point that must not be overlooked is that they are in our midst and that they require the united effort of American Jewry to enable them to properly adjust themselves to their new environment. During 1913 only 78 Levantine Jews were assisted by the Industrial Removal Office to settle in the interior. This is a trifling proportion of those who made application to it for removal. There have been a few cities which, recognizing the difficulty of the problem, have treated it in the broadest and essentially unselfish spirit. That a larger distribution promises the most practical and immediate results was recognized by the National Conference to which Dr. Pool's paper was presented and a subsequent conference held in the city of New York at the instance of Mr. Max Senior of Cincinnati also resulted in the recommendation that one of the prime needs in dealing with the problem, to quote the words of Mr. Senior, "is that the Industrial Removal Office be urged to distribute Levantine Jews in the interior"; a recommendation which we feel should have the earnest and active support and co-operation of interior communities.

In conclusion, we must again express our appreciation of the able manner in which Dr. Pool oriented the problem connected with Levantine Jewish immigration and of the social vision which characterizes the important recommendations which he has made. Dr. Pool's paper will not only arouse intellectual curiosity, but will stimulate organizations and individuals to a practical concern with the problem he has so finely presented.

Rev. Dr. Adolf Gutmacher, president of the Jewish Home for Consumptives of Baltimore, died suddenly Sunday afternoon, January 17th, on the train while en route to the meeting of the United Hebrew Congregations at Chicago. Dr. Gutmacher took a great deal of interest in work for tuberculosis patients, and besides being an officer of the Jewish Home for Consumptives, was secretary of the Eudowood Sanatorium. He was active in social work, and his death deprived his community of a very useful social worker.

## IN ANSWER TO ATTACKS ON THE ALLIANCE

At the eighth biennial session of the Conference of Jewish Charities at Memphis, May 6 to 8, 1914, Rev. Dr. de Sola Pool read an exhaustive study on Levantine Jews. With a loving heart, while showing the sterling qualities of these new immigrants, he pointed out the dangers to which they are exposed: called attention to the fact that they do not feel at home either with the Yiddish-speaking immigrants or with our organized charities; and he urged special measures fitting them.

### THE ALLIANCE TO EDUCATE OUR IMMIGRANTS?

In the discussion which followed, Mr. Maurice B. Hexter of Cincinnati said:

"As Dr. Pool has pointed out, most of these immigrants come from that district which is best described by the term 'The Levant.' The philanthropic agency, universally known by all Jews throughout this region and also trusted by them, is the Alliance Israelite Universelle. Their schools have trained thousands. Their friendship and reputation are established. Their whole-hearted disinterestedness is known to them. Moreover, the psychological tendencies of these people are well known to those in charge of this work. Why should not the Alliance Israelite Universelle extend its protecting and uplifting arm with regard to their charges in America? All of this under the guidance of the Industrial Removal Office."

### THE ALLIANCE TOO BUSY ELSEWHERE

Let us right here declare that the Alliance is not prepared to take care of immigrant Jews in this country. We have our hands full with the care of Jews in Persia, Turkey, Morocco, Yemen, etc. Immigrants of any race, once in this blessed land, with a little local help from their kin, can very well dig their own way.

### THE ALLIANCE FIRED ON

In JEWISH CHARITIES, Baltimore, June, 1914, Mr. Joseph Gedalecia and Mr. Albert L. Amateau, both active workers in the Federation of Oriental Jews, strongly criticised the Alliance. Mr. Gedalecia, with

reference to Mr. Hexter's proposition, said: "I would rather have the missionaries take up this work than the Alliance Israelite—that's what the Turkish Jews think of the Alliance." Mr. Amateau complained that Hebrew and religion in the Alliance schools are taught by uncouth and ignorant rabbis. We will see later what the Turkish Jews think of the Alliance and how they appreciate its educational work.

### DR. POOL'S VIEWS

To the foregoing attacks Dr. Pool added: "I feel sure that Mr. Hexter has not seen the work of the Alliance schools at close range, and that he does not know the spirit of them; for his suggestion, if carried out, would bring about the situation against which I warned. \* \* \* Its spirit is often anti-Jewish. The Alliance understands the spirit of the question far less than any American who knows nothing about it."

### WHAT DR. POOL HAS HIMSELF OBSERVED

Dr. Pool, not having been in the Orient, and not having visited an Alliance school, "has not seen the work of the Alliance schools at close range." But he has seen the Alliance pupils in this country, and when referring to illiteracy among Oriental Jews, who furnish a percentage of more than twenty-four, he says:

"But the best educated are those who have been pupils in the schools of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Smyrna, Salonica, Constantinople, etc. These have received a good modern education on French lines."

### ALLIANCE PUPILS IN AGRICULTURE

Then referring to agricultural work among Orientals, he says: "With the exception of some individuals who have been trained in the (Alliance) agricultural school, Mikveh Israel, at Jaffa, there are practically no agriculturists among them."

### ALLIANCE PUPILS TRUSTWORTHY

Dr. Pool further tells us: "The second point that would emerge clearly is the desirability of keeping these settlers away