

CHARITY BUILDING IN A SMALL COMMUNITY

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Hartford, Conn.

Hartford, in its social problems, is by no means unique, and it will, therefore, hardly be necessary to go into great details on the general situation. It is a city of 107,000, of whom about 12,000 are Jews, a large industrial and insurance center, giving employment, in normal times, to its entire population. The Jews are engaged in all lines. They are to be found in the rubber works, the typewriter factories, the machine shops, the tobacco farms and warehouses, as well as in the more usual lines of business, either as peddlers, clerks or proprietors of stores, small and large. In their places of residence they are just as widely dispersed. They have already penetrated the "best" residential districts, and are daily spreading farther and farther from the recognized Jewish quarters. The ghetto, if it can be called such, is by no means a slum, and, except for a very few blocks, it contains as comfortable and as clean houses as are to be found in much more restricted sections. The majority of the people live in three, four or six "tenement blocks," two or three stories in height, with one or two families to each floor.

All in all, the town is fairly prosperous, and in consequence, fairly conservative. In social activities it is still largely in the first stage, slumbering peacefully, though here and there can be seen the signs of awakening. Very well organized along the lines of religion and fraternal orders, all other forms of social endeavor were practically entirely neglected until two years ago. Charity was distributed without the least semblance of organization. There were five or six distinct Jewish relief societies, several "five-cent" ladies' societies, as well as any number of charitably inclined individuals who raised "handkerchief collections" by begging from store to store for such cases as came to their notice. Naturally, duplication and the other evils of indiscriminate charity became so prevalent as to arouse public interest. In July, 1912, after a preliminary campaign extending over several months, the United Jewish Charities was organized, chiefly through the

efforts of Rabbi H. W. Ettelson of the Temple Beth Israel. All of the relief organizations were induced to give up their separate existences for membership in the general society, and most of the unaffiliated individuals were also convinced that their duty lay in joining hands with the others. The only organizations which retained, and still retain their independence, are the Hebrew Ladies' Old People's Home, the Hebrew Ladies' Orphan Asylum Association and the Hebrew Ladies' Free Loan Society, all small organizations supported by orthodox women and insisting upon their autonomy.

Within the past year there has been organized a Talmud Torah along orthodox lines, it is true, but still of unlimited potential value. They have a beautiful building, with large rooms, excellently adaptable for settlement or recreational work. More recently a Young Men's Hebrew Association has entered the field, and promises to fill the great void in the lives of our Jewish young people, the lack of recreational facilities.

These movements, together with several others still nearer the incipient stage, show clearly that the community has, within the past two years, begun to realize its social needs, and to cast about for ways and means of meeting these responsibilities. Plans for a state-wide Jewish orphan asylum, initiated in New Haven, have received strong support in Hartford. A Jewish hospital is being considered, with every prospect of ultimate realization. Federation of all our Jewish activities, local and national, has already been proposed, and is simply being held back temporarily until its value is more fully appreciated.

So much for communal work. It is well started, and bids fair to cover the field completely and efficiently within a reasonable time. Intelligent direction, reinforced by virile enthusiasm, is behind each portion of the program, and will brook no unnecessary delay.

As to the United Jewish Charities proper, in its relief work the situation is not quite

so simple. Of the pioneers, the organizers of the society, it may be said: "They builded well." Their energy in obtaining new subscribers, and in raising funds for an organization upon an entirely new basis were remarkably successful. Giving to the society, according to a set rule, usually \$3 per year, was replaced by giving according to ability, and we now have about 800 members, representing about 2,500 families, subscribing from \$1 to \$250 annually. Many a larger town, with an organization much older than ours, would be envious of our situation as it is today.

For eighteen months after its founding all the work of the society was done by volunteers, eager and well-meaning, but without previous experience or training. No central authority was established, the work being divided among committees, and it was, without a doubt, well done, considering the many handicaps under which they labored. In January, 1914, at the annual meeting, it was decided to establish an office, and to obtain the services of an experienced and trained superintendent. A local man was engaged temporarily, and in January, 1914, I was called upon to take over the management. Mechanical details, such as the establishment of a record system, the centralization of the various departments, the correction of errors in the subscription records and elsewhere, can all be passed over without comment, and we can consider some of our present problems. The financial situation is not very bright. Our subscribers contribute about \$8,000 annually, but our budget calls for approximately \$9,000. Last year a theater benefit was held to meet the deficiency, but thus far no extraordinary measures have been adopted this year, although we are now about \$300 behind our income. This figure, when I came to Hartford, was \$700, and we have hopes of clearing off the balance of the deficit before the end of the year.

Our chief difficulty, and one which I am sure exists in most cities of this type, is the adaptation of modern ideals to the older and more conservative ideas of the orthodox group. Traditionally adverse to asking questions of an applicant for alms, and accustomed to giving each individual according to their ability, rather than to the

predetermined need of the recipient, it is difficult for these donors to realize the necessity for the utmost care in the distribution of relief. No matter what train of reasoning is used, only one answer will be recognized by an applicant, and it is not difficult to understand, therefore, why out of 1,000 cases reported during the eighteen months ending July 1, 1914, 977 received assistance. Ninety per cent of all applicants for aid were given relief! The figure is truly remarkable, and shows clearly the effect of unrestrained sympathy. Instead of using our organization as a court of last resort, after all personal resources have been exhausted, the tendency exists to apply, or rather to refer for aid at the first sign of trouble. The relationship between this group of subscribers and the applicants, living in the same houses, understanding each other thoroughly and naturally; making great sacrifices in times of need, is so much closer than the relationship between the subscriber and the organization, that the latter will frequently assist the applicant in ignoring important points, as to relatives, income and other salient facts, forcing us, willy nilly, to give relief, all our premonitions to the contrary notwithstanding.

We realize now that our salvation depends primarily upon gaining the implicit confidence of our community, and we are striving to obtain this through the use of many channels. Newspaper publicity, news letters to subscribers, personal visits to individual subscribers and to lodges, all are based upon the desire to reach a state of perfect understanding between the organization and its supporters. The success of this campaign of education cannot yet be known. It is a slow but usually successful process.

An excellent illustration of this difficulty with our constituents is the transient problem. These persons insist upon dealing with the transients, *Magid*, *schnorrer* and laborer alike, as if the only essential fact were his hunger. Since work cannot be found readily, the solution offered is simple, give him a ticket for a meal, a night's lodging and railroad accommodations to the next town. Fresh from the school of philanthropy and the United Hebrew Charities

ties of New York. I could hardly see the efficacy of this method of handling transients, and insisted upon a thorough interview, with inquiries and attempted solution of each case as it came up. Many refused to be interviewed, and these were immediately turned down. Of those investigated, most were, as was to be expected, found fraudulent, and these were likewise rejected. Within a month after this policy had been in force, I found that complaints were coming so thick and fast that the organization was shirking its responsibilities in not disposing of the transients, as had formerly been done so effectively. All who were turned down at my office simply went into the Jewish district and begged *nedovos* from store to store. The storekeepers, too selfish to refuse, and not interested in the ultimate result, insisted that they would not pay into two sources, and consequently I was forced to adopt the old expedient of getting rid of transients as cheaply and as quickly as possible, to prevent their begging on the streets. All the surrounding cities, New Haven, Springfield, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Meriden, New Britain and New London, are using the same methods of "treating" transients, with the result that we are all carrying an irksome burden, no one gains but the railroad company, while those transients who were originally decent soon lose all self-respect by being thus thrown aimlessly from pillar to post.

Communication with Mr. Louis H. Levin led me to adopt the middle course temporarily, while working for more far-reaching results. I am now following up each case thoroughly, in spite of the fact that I have already provided the man with transportation. This will give me much valuable material for educational propaganda, and show exactly the type of person applying for this form of relief. I have likewise written to the charity official or the rabbi in each of the above mentioned towns, suggesting a conference at which co-operative methods can be discussed and agreed upon. Signing the transportation agreement will not be a sufficient program, nor can we afford to support our transients until we determine their character, or adopt a plan of treatment according to accepted

methods. A work test, usually in the form of a wood pile, is obnoxious to the Jewish mind; our employers of unskilled labor cannot make use of our scrap material, and we are too weak financially to undertake the establishment of an independent workshop under our own auspices.

As soon as this question can be decided, and a constructive program established for dealing with transients, there will be no difficulty in organizing all the towns in Connecticut, and a great burden will have been removed from the communities. With the transient problem agreeably settled, our people will have more confidence in our methods, and will more readily listen to and appreciate our ideals and efforts. How has this been met in other communities? Hartford is by no means alone in its desire to be freed from oppression, and an answer to its difficulties will be welcomed by hundreds of communities throughout the breadth of the land.

New Building at Eagleville

In the presence of several hundred persons, a number of important additions to the Philadelphia Jewish Sanatorium for Consumptives at Eagleville, Pa., were dedicated on October 4th. The new structures comprise an administration building, an open-air schoolhouse for children, additional ward buildings, shacks and kiosks. The dedicatory exercises were held in the recently enlarged dining hall of the sanatorium, which was filled to its utmost capacity by the men and women who took part in the pilgrimage to Philadelphia's distant but very important charitable institution.

Mr. Louis Gerstley, president of the sanatorium, in opening the meeting, called upon Rabbi Isaac Landman of Temple Keneseth Israel to deliver the invocation, and Dr. Cyrus Adler to preside over the exercises.

Dr. Adler presented, as the principal orator of the day, Dr. Martin G. Brumbaugh, who delivered a stirring address, in which he lauded Pennsylvania's support of state charities, and pleaded for the continued support of the charities of the commonwealth, until it may be said that "Pennsylvania knows no sufferer and no needy cause to which it does not extend quickly and promptly the hand of hope and help."

THE FIRE AT SALEM

Martha M. Silverman

Boston

Salem, before the fire, had a Jewish population of over 350 families engaged mainly in business and peddling in all its forms, and a very small percentage were workmen employed in the shoe factories and mills. The people, as a whole, were an independent and self-respecting class, not troubled with too much wealth nor worried about the comparatively few poor. Charity had its old-fashioned meaning, giving to those who ask, and since but few had to ask the community was little taxed and consequently did not feel the need of a charitable organization. Salem, as in many small Jewish communities, where organization of any kind is made difficult by the many factions, class prejudices, ideas and assumed leaderships, had no leading or standing body of Jewish citizens that could assume charge or act intelligently and effectively at a crisis such as the conflagration had brought to the afflicted city. It was, therefore, necessary for the only and largest organized Jewish charity of the state, namely, the Federated Jewish Charities of Boston, to take charge in organizing and giving prompt, sympathetic and intelligent relief and meeting effectively the problem of rehabilitation.

The first few days following the fire all efforts were spent in finding and getting together the Jewish refugees who were scattered all over the city, from the fields, woods, hallways and spare rooms where two or three families were huddled together. They were a dazed, heart-broken and helpless lot, some having lost all their accumulated savings of years; others, while partially insured, had completely lost their business. Of the latter type were many of the custom peddlers who sold their wares mostly on credit in the French and Polish district, which was entirely destroyed, thus losing hundreds of dollars that their customers owed them with no prospects of regaining any part or re-establishing their business. Their credit, too, was entirely crippled. Their lot was most pitiful and presented a problem unique and one which was difficult for the General Relief Committee to understand and fully

appreciate. Still others had no insurance and were left utterly destitute. In spite of their sad lot, they were reluctant to accept charity in any form and it was with considerable difficulty that we succeeded in getting together forty or fifty men, women and children, housed them in temporary quarters rented by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society at 46 Lafayette Street, where food was supplied by the General Relief Committee, a Jewish cook employed and *kosher* food served and all their temporary needs met.

As no separate Jewish fund was established and all contributions sent to the General State Committee, the need of being a part and parcel of the general scheme was evident and necessary so that the Jewish sufferers were registered at General Registration Department for record and the avoidance of duplication.

The temporary Jewish quarters of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society assumed the aspect of the *Ochnosis Orchim* and its poorer feature of indiscriminate and insanitation, with the result that the place was closed within a few days after its establishment and arrangements were made to shelter the Jewish refugees at one of the camp fields in a group by themselves with special provision for *kosher* food and under the direct supervision of the militia and staff of Red Cross physicians and nurses. A special Jewish interpreter, a Salem resident, was also employed to interpret and care for their individual needs. The camp idea being foreign to the Jewish element, the plan met with disfavor and only seven families took advantage of the offer and the rest found shelter with friends and relatives within the city and its immediate suburbs.

Following this temporary housing, a corps of trained visitors, accompanied by resident volunteers, were sent out to visit and fully determine the immediate needs, future plans and possible resources, such as insurance, relatives, etc. As none of the Jewish sufferers were willing to stand in the bread line for their food, arrangements were made to have provisions sent