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MEETING AGAIN

By

DR. PINKHOS CHURGIN

In its historical perspective this college, the Yeshiva College, is attempting a new rapprochement between Jewish and general culture. Jewish Hellenism was the product of the first definite, friendly encounter of Jewish culture with foreign culture. It resulted in a union, delightful, curious, baffling, but intense with new thought—and no thought is devoid of a gleaming of truth. Judaism found in Hellenism a new form of expression for its basic ideas and conceptions; and philosophy, always eager to rediscover itself, could not remain unenticed by the charms of the new wisdom. It left its indelible stamp on human thought through the channels of religion. It influenced Jewish thought in a lesser degree because its era of bloom coincided with the most tragic experience of the Jewish people at the hands of the Romans.

Judaism met philosophy again in its Arabic overhauls. The new fusion let off a stream of ideas which fertilized human thought, reaching its most desolate territories. It shook the European mind of its dormancy. But the Jewish philosopher was not a mere agent in planting philosophy among the European nations. Judaism was reasserted in this so-called Jewish Arabic philosophy. Maimonides was no copyist. He was no mere interpreter. He was one of the moulders of thought. It was this new Jewish thought which burst upon Europe in the Middle Ages. Western civilization was again vitalized by Judaism.

A succession of persecutions, of expulsions and butcheries called for a halt in the march of Jewish philosophy. Plunged in sorrow and repeatedly forced into exile, the Jew was groping to retrace the broken path of his spirit, groping for new con-

tacts, but he was only to be thrown back by new attacks of religious fanaticism. Neither the Italian Jewish scholar nor the Marano thinker was able to re-establish the contacts between Jewish and general culture.

The modern period witnessed the remarkable dash of the Jew toward the freed domains of Western culture. He easily appropriated the new essences. Jews became masters in many fields of human thought. Some succeeded in ascending to its higher regions. But they all contributed as individuals. They exercised an excellence to which the nationality of its owner was a mere accident. Some Jewish landmark may be running through the work of the Jewish author, but, whatever its force, it is a note of an original endowment. The great bulk of Jewish men of letters and scientists of all description are singularly unaffected by Jewish culture. They have scarcely any knowledge of it. Some of the greatest lights in present-day European literature are Jews who have completely detached themselves from Jewish life and Jewish thought. The Jewish authors in American literature, with a few exceptions, have the bad taste to parade their ignorance also of Jewish habits. Jewish culture has not been brought nearer to Western culture through all of them than before—not to speak of an actual contact between these cultures. Two great thinkers of modern times have made a forceful attempt to correlate the distinct ideas of the cultures—Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen. But in the absence of forces propitious to a real union between Jewish and Western culture, their attempt was doomed to isolation. They had no successors.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Dr. Churgin is Associate Professor of Hebrew Literature. He is, also, Principal of the Teachers' Institute of the Yeshiva. It is indeed an honor to receive his contribution.

The Yeshiva College represents an organized and concentrated effort to bring general culture within the radiating reach of Jewish culture. Here general culture is in intimate touch with Jewish culture. The College, the base of secular learning, rests on the fringes of the home of Jewish learning, the Yeshiva. Both mark their impression on the mind of the student. His will be a knowledge which fosters understanding. Spared the violence which accompanies passage into the fold of general culture, his creative faculties will be accessible to a natural interplay of contrasting ideas. He

will seek to examine one in the light of the other. The creative mind will then respond to the flashes of a new Jewish philosophy.

Jewish culture is as resourceful as ever before. Its vigor is undiminished. It has the will to expand, to create. The Yeshiva College is creating the potentialities for its expansion.

This is, as I can see it, the historical significance of the Yeshiva College. It has more comforts in store for the Jew. Yet in the realization of the fruit of the new union of cultures lies its strength and great promise.

THE DIVINE MOMENTS

At times I am a whirl of seething raging life-blood!

A battered cog within time's hurly-burly!

My nerves are shattered, my brains a fevered rage,

A clanging, roaring engine, a stormy, wrecking sea.

O Lord Supreme, grant me a moment fair,
Devoid of pangs of care and pain,
Disturbing passions, ceaseless future worries.
A moment, unflurried by ecstasies grandiose, sublime,
Unmaddened by the moody whimsicalities of clime.

O G-d, I crave for calm,
I crave for peaceful gentle progress,
I want a softly flowing trend of thought,
Joining ends with Eden streams primeval,
Touching springs of eternal Universals!

E. L.