

**HARRY FISCHER**  
**Pioneer of Jewish Philanthropy**

*Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle  
and the Years Beyond*

Augmented Edition



# **HARRY FISCHEL**

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### ***Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle and the Years Beyond***

Augmented Edition

*Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle (through 1928)*

Edited by Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein

Continuation (1928–1941)

Written by Harry Fischel

Preface to Augmented Edition

By Chief Rabbi Emeritus Shear-Yashuv Cohen

Chairman of the Board of the Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation;

President of Machon Harry Fischel;

Founder of the Ariel United Israel Institutes for Training of Rabbis

Augmented Edition (through 1948 and beyond)

Edited by Rabbi Aaron I. Reichel, Esq.

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*About the cover photographs:*

Top: original building of Yeshiva College in New York. Bottom: original building of Harry Fischel Institute for Research in Jewish Law (Machon Harry Fischel) in Jerusalem. Center: Harry Fischel as he appeared at cornerstone laying ceremony of Yeshiva College in 1927.

*About the photograph in the back flap:*

The official Jerusalem street sign named for Yisrael Aharon (Harry) Fischel includes a description, in Hebrew, which can be translated as follows: "philanthropist, founded Institute for Talmudic Research in Jerusalem, 5625-5708 (1865-1948)."

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## **Introduction to the Augmented Edition**

When Harry Fischel wrote the text that became his biography, *Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle*, he was sixty-three years old and had accomplished more in general, and especially in philanthropy, than most people can even fantasize about accomplishing in a lifetime. He could not have known then, in 1928, that he was destined to live another twenty years, and that in those twenty years he would do more to perpetuate his name and legacy, by creating new Jewish institutions bearing his name, than he had in the prior sixty-three years, during which he had focused on creating, supporting, and strengthening myriads of other Jewish institutions! Incredibly, it was not until after his official biography was published—the only edition actually published in his lifetime—that he founded the Harry Fischel Institute (known as the Machon Harry Fischel) in Jerusalem, the Harry Fischel School for Higher Jewish Studies at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University, and the Harry Fischel Foundation (later renamed the Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation) in New York, the latter of which continues to initiate projects as it has done for the past eighty years. Nor could he have known that during the Great Depression, which began in 1929, a year after his biography was initially published, he would almost single-handedly save Yeshiva College from bankruptcy and dissolution. He surely could not have anticipated actually becoming the Acting President of the College at one point, even if for a limited period of time, as memorialized in a plaque in the lobby of the main building of the campus he had conceived in his capacity as a very active Chairman of the Building Committee.

The story of the creation of Machon Harry Fischel is really the story of two visionaries. After the Great Depression set in, Fischel consulted Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoheh Kook, the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, as to ideas for a unique school for higher rabbinic studies. Rabbi Kook suggested recruiting the best young Talmudic

scholars in the country for a yeshiva that would stand out not just for the scholarship of its students but for their research as well. The two visionaries founded such a school, and about two decades later, when it became apparent that there was a need for judges to staff the new religious courts being set up to serve the religious community in the new State of Israel, a nucleus of the best and the brightest was already at hand. The next Chief Rabbi of Israel, Isaac Herzog, established a rigorous program in the Machon to train these seasoned scholars to serve as judges in the new courts. A majority of the openings on the religious courts have for decades been filled by graduates of the Machon Fischel, which has also continued to maintain its preeminent reputation in the yeshiva world and beyond for its research projects from original sources and its publications on a high level, as well as its services for the local community. (The reader will find more about the Machon beginning on page 410 and on page 475.) For decades, the Chief Rabbi of Israel served as president of the Machon and delivered lectures there.

The Harry Fischel School for Higher Jewish Studies at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University is discussed beginning on page 478. The text of the agreement signed by Harry Fischel, the president of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Yeshiva College (together known as Yeshiva University when subsequently reorganized), and the chairman of the board begins on page 481. Under the terms of the agreement, the Fischel Foundation agreed to pay an annual sum (which it has since increased unilaterally) “in order to induce the ‘Yeshiva’ [and its successor, the university] to found, maintain, and bear the expenses of said Harry Fischel School for Higher Jewish Studies . . . [which sum] shall be used exclusively for the instruction only,” except that up to 20 percent may be spent for publications, “and all other expenses [are to] be paid by the ‘Yeshiva’ in running the said School. . . . it is also mutually agreed that the said ‘Harry Fischel

School for Higher Jewish Studies' shall always be conducted in accordance with the law and spirit of Orthodox Judaism.”

The Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation (originally, the Harry Fischel Foundation) is discussed primarily on pages 424–425 of the Continuation, and on the web site at [fischelfoundation.org](http://fischelfoundation.org), which describes how the primary purpose of the Foundation remains to support the Harry Fischel Institute in Israel, but the Foundation's scope has been broadened to also contribute to the support of the Harry Fischel School for Higher Jewish Studies, affiliated with the Bernard Revel Graduate School at Yeshiva University, and other particular institutions, as well as many creative projects that the Foundation has initiated in the United States.

Beit Harav Kook, the residence and *beit midrash* (house of study) built for the first Chief Rabbi of what was then known as Palestine—and is now Israel proper, of course—was discussed in detail in *Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle*, reproduced in this volume on pages 238–241 and 287–303. What is *not* mentioned there, however, and what could not have been known at the time, is that, as a byproduct of the original concept of being a residence for the Chief Rabbi, the structure that Harry Fischel built and subsidized at his own expense served from 1924 to 1964 as the venue of the religious Zionist flagship yeshiva, HaYeshiva HaMercaz HaOlamit, which came to be known as Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav—a historic venue for forty years of study for a principle. The full significance of this yeshiva, along with its official English name, is discussed in the Preface.

The Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav was relocated to an independent structure in the Kiryat Moshe neighborhood of Jerusalem in 1964. Beit Harav has been preserved ever since as a resource center and a living museum under the leadership of Rabbi Yochanan Fried, with audiovisual presentations, and ongoing study sessions and seminars conducted by Rabbi Itzhak Marmorstein and others. It is a landmark to this day, situated at Rechov Rav Kook 9, and is part of the tours of the city of Jerusalem conducted by professional tour

guides to the gratification of all people who wish to see the inspirational sights of this most inspirational city.

This supplemented edition of the biography of Harry Fischel came about for several reasons, each of which would alone have justified the republication of the book. (1) The original biography, as published in 1928, could no longer possibly do justice to its founder in light of all that he accomplished in the years afterward. (2) Harry Fischel had written a Continuation taking him into the 1940s, but it had never been circulated and published beyond his family and close friends and associates. (3) Not only is the original biography out of print, but its publisher has been out of business for many years. (4) At the time the republication was approved, the original biography was barely available for purchase even on the Internet. (5) It is now being made available to be downloaded with some of the currently most popular technologies. (6) As time progresses, the pressures of economics and technology will discourage the hard-copy publication of more and more books, so the window of opportunity for publishing books in traditional hard copy is gradually closing. (7) The Fischel Foundation wants the biography to be available in as many forms as possible, hardcover and paperback, traditional, digitized for the present, and available for the future via technologies not yet invented. (8) The publication of the supplemented edition makes the book available for the present generation, and also for future generations. (9) The supplementary portions correct, for the record, certain mistakes in articles about Harry Fischel and his achievements in encyclopedias and other publications. (10) Above all, the goal is greater than to merely tell the life story of an individual, for it is designed to recount what a single person who came to America penniless could do for himself and for humanity in general, and for traditional Judaism in particular, in the hope that readers will be inspired by his example to stand steadfastly for their principles and to dream dreams just as ambitious as his and then to implement them.

In every era, many people who fail to achieve their potential blame it on their environment or on their lack of opportunities in life. Many fall into a state of despair, and never rise out of it. This book and the life of its protagonist, should provide them with hope. Many people feel that even if they have good credentials and work hard, they are no longer guaranteed a rewarding job, and the situation is even bleaker for people who were not fortunate enough to have been born in surroundings conducive to success in the workplace. They would do well to examine the life of Harry Fischel, as described in this book. He came to this country as an immigrant without any money to speak of, without any English to speak in, and without any of today's commonly available social benefits to avail himself of. To make matters tougher, he came without any other family members to support him, and in fact shared his meager initial earnings with his elderly parents in Europe, to whom he sent money when he was still living on bread and coffee.

To make matters even more difficult for him, Harry Fischel was a Sabbath observer. His religion forbade him to work on Saturdays, this in an era when the six-day work week was the norm. In consequence, he was unwilling and unable to work on a day that for others was a normal working day. Employers and potential employers were not willing to make exceptions for Sabbath-observing employees. Thus, even when Fischel managed to find a job, he was routinely fired on the first Monday of his employment, and sometimes without even being paid for the hard work that he had performed in good faith.

Nevertheless, Harry Fischel persevered; he did odd jobs at first; he worked very hard; eventually he was hired for full-time employment; at some point he became an employer himself; and eventually he made it into the top tier of that coveted top 1 percent of Americans. Clearly, when Fischel came to this country, he was poorer than most poor Americans today; his early years were more difficult and challenging; his American education was lower; his

knowledge of English was worse; there were no bilingual programs on the federal, state, or local level; welfare benefits and food stamps did not exist; there was no safety net for the poor. Yet with a work ethic, a creative mind, and a belief in G-d, he accomplished more than most people with a far more auspicious upbringing. So almost every reader of this book will begin life, or did begin life, with a head start on him, and can dream of going as far as he did, or further, knowing that such dreams can turn into realities.

Rags do not necessarily turn into riches, however. Many people work as hard as Harry Fischel did and never even rise into, let alone past, the middle class. Those who have analyzed the charmed life of Harry Fischel often come to the conclusion that the almost supernatural challenges he faced and overcame, and the almost superhuman sacrifices he made, in observing the Sabbath, and in caring for and following the guidance of his elderly parents half a world away, may have been rewarded by his corresponding subsequent seemingly almost supernatural successes.

Fischel's road to riches was not an easy one, but in fact was a rather unconventional one. He figured out how to develop irregularly shaped lots of land that were not being utilized, bought them at bargain prices, developed them far beyond their apparent potential, and before long, "the story of the next few years reads like a fairy tale." Harry Fischel, the poor immigrant, overcame the restrictions of his religion to develop not just land into buildings, and buildings into institutions, but also uneducated students into scholars with unlimited repositories of Jewish culture, tradition, and scholarship, via a combination of educational, spiritual, and charitable organizations.

Fischel was described in a scholarly journal as "perhaps the richest Orthodox Jew in New York" in his prime (see Ophir, in References). Whether or not this was actually true, what is far more significant is the way he spent his money and his time after rising to financial and social prominence. He has also been described

as a visionary and a pioneer on behalf of the growth of American Judaism as we know it, as well as of Judaism in Israel. He was instrumental in the creation and maintenance of more national and nationally known Jewish institutions, and most especially of Orthodox Jewish institutions, than virtually anyone else in history before or since, and certainly in the first half of the twentieth century.

Perhaps no less remarkable, in an era when Orthodox Jews were virtually unable to find employment if they followed Jewish law and their consciences by refusing to work on the Jewish Sabbath, Harry Fischel, upon becoming a successful independent employer, became an icon in the Jewish world by giving his employees both Saturday and Sunday as paid days off at a time when the six-day work week was universal.

This expanded book incorporates the original biography, *Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle*, exactly as it was originally produced in 1928, and adds the Continuation that takes the reader into the 1940s, along with a Preface entitled “The Founder,” by a most illustrious Chief Rabbi (now emeritus) whose own achievements are legendary. It also includes a brief description of the Harry Fischel Institute for Research in Jewish Law (the Machon Harry Fischel) as it has developed over the years; a brief description of the Harry Fischel School for Higher Jewish Studies (HFSfHJS) at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University, written by the dean of those schools; an Appendix consisting of the original agreement for the creation of the HFSfHJS, as signed by Harry Fischel plus the president of Yeshiva University and the chairman of its board of directors; an Epilogue taking the reader through Harry Fischel’s final years; a brief listing of significant references to him in print; and a supplementary index of all the new material that appears in this now completed biography.

May the augmented edition inspire a new generation and generations to come to apply the values and dynamic, creative, and optimistic spirit of Harry Fischel to the future of Judaism in Israel, America, and throughout the world.

Aaron I. Reichel  
Administrator  
Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation

ר' ישראל אהרן פישל ז"ל—Harry Fischel of blessed memory—was one of the most famous Jewish philanthropists in Eretz Yisrael and the United States, known all over the world as a leading founder and supporter of תורת ארץ ישראל, Religious Zionism, and modern Orthodoxy. He was not merely a most generous donor who supported many institutions as well as many needy individuals and families. His way was not only to be benevolent to worthy people and institutions. He involved himself personally in the projects and worthy causes to which he contributed large sums, and he tried to make sure that they would continue to exist in perpetuity. His name is attached to many of the most important institutions of Orthodoxy, that were founded during his lifetime and serve as a legacy to his family, recalling his seminal contribution to the destiny of the Jewish people in the Holy Land, in the United States, and the world over.

Harry Fischel's success in business enabled him to initiate projects that he regarded as vital for the development of Torah Study and Religious Zionism in the modern world. He was part of the founding group that created Yeshiva College, and he helped Rabbi Dr. Bernard Revel זצ"ל enlarge it into Yeshiva University. He led the effort to build a new campus for it in Washington Heights in New York City and served as the chairman of its building committee for many years. He himself gave very sizeable contributions to Yeshiva and was also one of its leading fund-raisers.

In recognition of his efforts, the Beth Midrash—the synagogue and main lecture hall in the main building of Yeshiva University—was named in perpetuity The Harry Fischel Study Hall. This recognized Harry Fischel's part in the founding and furthering of the university's *Torah u-Madda* heritage, which has become the hallmark of American Jewry and is connected with such illustrious names as Rabbi Bernard Revel, Rabbi Samuel Belkin, and last but not least, the great Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik זצ"ל.

\*

On his first visit to Palestine, Harry Fischel was the guest of the British High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, who was himself Jewish. Sir Herbert convinced him to build Beit Harav, which served as the home, office, and yeshiva of the founder of the Chief Rabbinate in the Holy Land, who was also its first Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook o.b.m. (זצ"ל מרן הראי"ה קוק). When Harry Fischel met the great Rabbi Kook, he was deeply impressed with his views and personality, and the two men became life-long partners in the work for *Klal Yisrael*.

Out of this partnership many great institutions were established under the umbrella of the Central World Yeshiva, better known today as Yeshivat Mercaz Harav, the alma mater of all Bnei Akiva yeshivot and the *yeshivot hesder*, whose students combine Torah study with sharing the burden of defense, serving side by side with the rest of the country's youth in the Israel Defense Forces. Its students and graduates serve in many elite security positions as well as in positions of rabbinic leadership, and they are admired both by Israel's leaders and by the rank-and-file of the people of Israel.

In 5692/1932 Harav Kook זצ"ל and Harry Fischel זצ"ל together established Machon Harry Fischel, the world-renowned postgraduate Institute for the Research and Study of Talmud and Jewish Law. A committee of renowned *Gedolei Hatorah* (recognized Torah authorities) of the Holy Land interviewed the many candidates and chose eighteen outstanding graduates of the leading yeshivot in Jerusalem to be the first Fellows of the Institute (known as the Machon). Over the years, hundreds of outstanding young scholars—עילויים—have become Fellows. Almost all of them eventually went on to become important rabbis, rabbinic judges, educators, and other leaders of the Jewish world. To this day the graduates of “Harry Fischel,” as it is popularly called, are regarded as the elite, not only of the Israeli rabbinate but also of the spiritual leadership

of Jewry the world over. Finally, the publications of the Machon are regarded as outstanding in the fields of classic Jewish law and Talmudic research.

\*

Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein ה"צ, my late father-in-law, convinced Harry Fischel ה"צ, his father-in-law, to write his autobiography, with the idea that Fischel could serve as an exemplar for other Orthodox business people and leaders. The result was the book *Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle*, which was edited by Rabbi Goldstein and published in 1928 by Bloch Publishing Company. Impressive as the book is, however, it does not cover Harry Fischel's life and manifold activities and contributions, during the pivotal years of Jewish growth worldwide, culminating with the events that brought about the establishment of the State of Israel. His deeds and great achievements in the last twenty years of his life are certainly part of Jewish history.

We are indeed very lucky that Harry Fischel and his son-in-law wrote a further account of his life. Several copies of this account, which we refer to as the Continuation, survived in a typed manuscript that remained in the hands of the Goldstein children. Reading that part of the biography is a most fascinating experience.

Harry Fischel passed away in Jerusalem in Tevet 5708 at the age of eighty-three, and was buried in the impressive mausoleum he had prepared for himself, just as the fighting of the Israel War of Independence commenced. He was the last Jew to be buried on the Mount of Olives, until it was reconquered in 1967.

The Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation has now taken the initiative to prepare and publish a complete biography of Harry Fischel ה"צ that includes both the first, already published volume, and the Continuation, which until now was only available in manuscript form. We are very grateful to the Almighty and are proud to make this work available to the public using the good and professional offices of the KTAV Publishing House.

Our Rabbis tell us that עיקר תולדותיהם של צדיקים תורה ומעשים טובים.  
This is certainly true when we speak about Harry Fischel's life. May  
we all acquire merit in his זכות.

יהי זכרו ברוך וזכותו תגן עלינו ועל כל ישראל. אמן

**Chief Rabbi Emeritus Shear-Yashuv Cohen**, Haifa  
President, Machon Harry Fischel, and  
Founder, Ariel: United Israel Institutes

כנפש המברך באהבה  
הכותב וחותם לכבוד התורה  
לומדיה ועושיה,

הרב שאר ישוב כהן  
החופעיה"ק חיפה ת"ו

## **Acknowledgments**

The Board members of the Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation deserve commendation for not just approving the project of republishing and augmenting the Fischel biography, but also for reviewing the new material and debating various issues. This Board also benefits from the wise and useful advice of the respective spouses of some of its members, most notably Dr. Naomi Goldstein Cohen (a granddaughter of Harry Fischel and the wife of Chief Rabbi Emeritus Shear-Yashuv Cohen) and Deborah “Debby” Jane Stepelman (a great-granddaughter of Harry Fischel, the wife of the Foundation Board member Jay Stepelman, and mother of the Foundation 2nd Vice-President Chaim Stepelman, Esq.).

The augmented edition is greatly enhanced and placed in perspective by the eloquent Preface entitled “The Founder,” written by the Chairman of the Board of the Foundation, Haifa Chief Rabbi Emeritus Shear-Yashuv Cohen.

The presidents and other leaders of the Foundation who have made all its activities possible—from the Founder until the current President, Seth Michael Goldstein, Esq.—and spanned by the Founder’s protégé and grandson Simeon H. F. Goldstein as the long-time executive director—are duly noted on page 29a, below.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity I was given to implement the Foundation’s resolution to publish an augmented version of the biography by writing an Introduction and an Epilogue, by writing some preliminary notes about the Continuation, augmenting the Index as described below, and compiling an expanded list of references, placing Fischel’s activities and the organizations he supported in further perspective.

Appreciation is also accorded to Rabbi Hillel M. Reichel, Director of the Machon and 1st Vice-President of the Foundation, for updating the Continuation as to the works of the Harry Fischel Institute (the Machon) and putting the Machon into a contemporary context. Similarly, appreciation is accorded to Dean David

Berger, of the Bernard Revel Graduate School, and therefore also of the Harry Fischel School for Higher Jewish Studies. He explained most succinctly, compellingly, and persuasively the ongoing value of the latter school. Finally, Fischel Board member Donald Moses chaired a committee to advise the publisher's staff in designing the cover of this book, with remarkable professionalism, creativity, and sensitivity.

The publisher, Bernie Scharfstein, not only approved the project but also oversaw every aspect of it with the enthusiasm, energy, and creativity of two men half his age combined. He also edited all the new material, along with the experienced and proactive copy editor he selected, Robert Milch. The original biography had been written in the third person and edited by Rabbi Dr. Herbert S. Goldstein. The Continuation was written by Harry Fischel himself, in the first person, and was edited by Rabbi Goldstein in Fischel's lifetime and then was lightly edited again by yours truly twice, once before and once after submitting the manuscript to KTAV, as discussed above. Adam Bengal was also very much involved in the production of the book.

The designing of the book was led by Lori Martinsek, President of Adept Content Solutions. Her credits read like a *Who's Who* of the most elite publishers in the world, from Britannica to Merriam-Webster, Microsoft Press, and MIT Press. She instantly internalizes concepts, understands challenges, and comes up with perfectly targeted options and solutions. Working cooperatively with her were Jason Pankoke, who developed the cover and text design, and Raymond Stoia, who coordinated the editorial efforts and indexed the new content to closely parallel the style of the original title.

I am particularly grateful to the Foundation for giving me the opportunity to insert into the Supplemental Index many key words from the original book that had been omitted from the original index or that had not been cited by more than one version or

cross-referenced. Some entries in the original index have taken on new nuances with the passage of time. Thus, the Supplemental Index is of significant assistance to readers and potential readers seeking to know whether and to what extent key topics and personalities are covered. The original classic work was on assigned reading lists in American Jewish history when it was originally available and can now be restored to such lists, more useful, comprehensive, and accessible than ever before.

Shirley Weisberger and Rochelle Ackerman, of the Foundation office, were also tremendously helpful in a variety of ways.

May G-d bless all those who have implemented the values of Harry Fischel, and may G-d bless this book and the institutions that continue to carry on his good deeds the way G-d blessed these institutions in his lifetime.

AIR

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MR. FISCHEL AS HE IS TODAY AT THE AGE OF  
SIXTY-THREE.

# FORTY YEARS OF STRUGGLE FOR A PRINCIPLE

THE BIOGRAPHY OF HARRY FISCHEL

*Edited by*

RABBI HERBERT S. GOLDSTEIN

Compiled from Mr. Fischel's daily diary, newspaper clippings, editorials, and addresses delivered by him during his forty years of service to the Jewish Community.



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## PREFACE

By RABBI HERBERT S. GOLDSTEIN

It is both a delicate and grateful task that has been entrusted to me by my dear father-in-law, Mr. Harry Fischel, that of editing his biography. Were I not tied to him by a close bond of family relationship, as well as by strong ties of affection and respect, this history might never have been compiled.

Despite the many significant achievements in diverse fields which have given to Mr. Fischel an international reputation and have caused him to be loved and admired by Jewry throughout the world, it is the human element which is the dominating note in Mr. Fischel's career.

It is this personal side of Mr. Fischel, quite as much as his public side, that has gained for him the lasting gratitude of his co-religionists of Russian birth, and early earned him the respect of the most powerful figures in American Jewry, with whom he met as an equal and whose gifts to philanthropy he matched, or exceeded, although his wealth was infinitesimal as compared to theirs.

By his example, indeed, he set an entirely new standard of giving for the Jew of Russian birth and not undeservedly has been hailed in many quarters as the Russian Jacob H. Schiff. Not only his money contributions to religious and philanthropic causes, but his life-time of service to these causes, has resulted in the name of Harry Fischel being almost as well known in Europe and in Palestine as in America, for he has never geographically limited his interest or his aid, and his service has been universal where Jewry and Israel were concerned.

Mr. Fischel's life, surrounded by even greater privations, hardships and temptations than fall to the lot of the average man, has been directed by a singleness of purpose, amounting to a passion, which has had as its sole objective, the perpetuation of orthodox Judaism, both in precept and in practice. It will be only possible for the reader to understand Mr. Fischel's passion for a life of service to humanity when he grasps the conditions of his early environment and the parental influences that moulded

his character, a character that is, indeed, unusual, as his life has been unusual, possibly unique, among those who have contributed to the world's good and whose deeds have secured general recognition.

The title of this biography is expressive of the mainspring actuating Mr. Fischel's whole life, for his single thought and purpose has been to advance the cause of Orthodox Judaism in America and throughout the world, no matter at what sacrifice to himself.

Since the Jewish religion teaches us charity as one of its most important principles, it has followed, as a matter of course, that Mr. Fischel's life should have been largely devoted to philanthropy.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Fischel has been a pioneer in almost every phase of his life's activities, a pioneer, first among those Jews who emigrated to this country from their native Russia, and made America the land of their adoption and fealty; second, a pioneer in showing how the traditions of Judaism might be transplanted to alien soil and still be made to flourish; third, a pioneer in pointing the way and making it possible for thousands of Jewish working men and women to maintain their religious principles, live up to the dietary laws of their faith, and observe the sacredness of the Sabbath day, despite economic pressure; fourth, a pioneer in leading the cause of Jewish education and religious training for the young; fifth, a pioneer in Jewish philanthropy, setting an example to the Jews of Russian birth by his unusual contributions to Jewish charities; six, a pioneer in business method and practice in his chosen field of building, which not alone enabled him to be of distinct service to the community in these activities but to earn the comfortable fortune which has made possible the devotion of his time and of his means to the manifold religious, educational and philanthropic movements with which his entire life has been identified.

The first chapters of this biography have been evolved entirely from Mr. Fischel's personal recollections of his boyhood and youth which he has related to the writer solely from the storehouse of his memory. These chapters bring his career up to the year 1900, and may be said to represent the first phase of a life that, from this period on, was to be marked by undertakings in the world of charity and business that brought him into the closest relations with men of affairs, leaders in finance, in com-

munal endeavor, in religion, scholarship and learning, and in public and private citizenship, including several Presidents of the United States and others in high office.

Fortunately for this record, the principal events in these later years are kept green by public addresses, manuscripts, letters, newspaper articles, editorials and other documents which form a complete history, not alone of Mr. Fischel's connection with the many occurrences of historic importance to Judaism, but of the events themselves.

It is my hope and prayer that, in later years, I may have the opportunity of editing Mr. Fischel's biography from the point where this chronicle leaves off and that this book, together with succeeding chapters that may be written, will be the means of giving a new impetus to the religious faith and teachings of our fathers, to the unification of Israel, to the education of our children in the holy law of the Talmud and the Bible and, finally, to the perpetuation for all time of those ideals and standards of religious conviction which comprise our faith and which it is our duty to preserve in all their original beauty, truth and sanctity, not alone for our children, but for the generations yet unborn.

May God bless this work.



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## FOREWORD

I HAVE been urged by many persons to set down the details of what they have been good enough to interpret as a varied, interesting and useful life, largely spent in the fields of religious, educational and philanthropic endeavor.

The requests of these kindly disposed individuals would not have prevailed had I not wished primarily to preserve the record of my early struggles, and what I may have since been enabled to accomplish, for the benefit and instruction of my children and grandchildren and, in turn, for their children, in the hope that they may derive from this history some measure of inspiration, namely to be true to the ideals of their religious heritage and to serve their fellowmen.

My first thought was to write an autobiography, but as I can lay no claim to sufficient literary ability, on account of lack of opportunity in my early youth to acquire an extensive education, I have sought to do the next best thing, namely to prepare the story in my own simple way. This I have given to another to set forth in a manner that I trust will interest and appeal to the reader.

I have entrusted this work to my son-in-law, Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, who is far better qualified than I in the art of putting pen to paper and whose life and labors in the Rabbinate and in the fields of Jewish education and communal activities are so entirely in keeping with my own sympathies and efforts.

Rabbi Goldstein has assumed the task as a labor of love, eager and anxious to perform what we both hope will be a service to those causes which shall best advance the future of Judaism and shall help preserve our traditional faith for the generations to come after us.

The Almighty has vouchsafed to me the means, the time and the opportunity to devote a large part of my energies to the cause of Jewish education, to the religious training of the orphans and other young people, and to many philanthropic objects throughout the world designed to extend aid to the afflicted or distressed.

I have always believed that one should not shirk an obligation or shift it to other shoulders and so, in order that this biography might have the merit of a true history and in order that I might see it when completed and have the privilege of giving to others the lessons I have learned, I have personally prepared the facts.

Up to the year 1900, when my activities began to attract public notice, I have relied entirely upon my memory to relate to Rabbi Goldstein the account of my boyhood and the first fifteen years of my struggles and early undertakings in America. From that point on, my personal recollection has been reinforced by newspaper articles, editorials, speeches and reports which I have preserved and value highly.

I am now at that period in life when I can peacefully contemplate those youthful experiences which, at the time, were fraught with difficulties and anxieties and I look forward to the future years with the hope of being spared, to use the blessings that have been vouchsafed me, in the interests of those religious and philanthropic movements which lie closest to my heart.

It is my desire in the coming years, not only to devote the major portion of my time to labors that shall advance the cause of Israel, but also to expend, while living, a portion of the wealth with which I have been endowed, in support of those objects which are most likely to preserve our Orthodox faith and to be of the largest benefit to mankind.

It is my belief that philanthropy's gain is largest where personal service goes hand in hand with giving and that the giver derives from this system the keenest satisfaction and contributes most to the causes he would assist. For this reason, I have no desire to accumulate a fortune merely with the idea of bequeathing it to charity at my death. It is rather my intention to give while I am living and while I may have the opportunity of exercising a controlling influence over my gifts, to the end that they may most fully accomplish their purpose.

I feel it my duty to give credit for the inspiration which has guided my life and made possible whatever I have accomplished, to my sainted father and mother of Blessed Memory, from whom I gained those religious precepts and the example of righteous living which they set forth in their daily lives. To their teaching was due entirely my determination to consecrate my life to acts of service to others.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my children who have given me the great joy of inclining from their earliest years toward lives of piety and charitable deeds and who have required no urging to prompt them to follow the example I have tried to give them. The Almighty in His Wisdom saw fit to take away four sons in their infancy, but He has blessed us with four daughters who have been afforded the opportunities for education denied me in my youth. I am also thankful to the Almighty that each of my daughters is happily married to a worthy man and blessed with lovely children. It is a source of still further thankfulness to me that each of my sons-in-law is imbued with the same inherent love of religion and charity as are my daughters.

It is to my wife and daughters, to my sons-in-law and my grandchildren that this biography is dedicated, and I shall here take the liberty of naming them.

There is first my beloved wife, whose maiden name was Jane Brass, and to whom I have been happily joined in bonds of holy matrimony for over forty years, a loyal wife, a devoted mother and a true companion.

My daughters are, first, Sadie Gertrude, who graduated from Public School as valedictorian of her class, is a graduate Bachelor of Arts of Hunter College, and holds the degree of Master of Arts from Columbia University.

On November 26th, 1914, she became the wife of David Kass, a son of A. L. Kass, for a generation respected by his fellowmen in the field of banking, in which business his son is now engaged for himself. They had grown up together from childhood, both families having been friends for years, and having neighboring country homes, where they spent their summers. Their union has been blessed with two daughters, Helen Joy, ten years of age, who is named after my sainted Mother, and Babette who is seven years old. These two children are receiving a thorough Jewish religious education and the knowledge of Hebrew as a living language is set down for them as a necessary part of their studies, as is their study of English and French.

My daughter Rebecca, a graduate of Barnard College, on March 7, 1915, married Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, then Rabbi of the Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun, 121 E. 85th Street, New York City, where I came to form a fond attachment for him.

I first knew him as a boy of ten when he attended the Congregation Beth Hamedrash Hagadol in Norfolk Street, where I was Vice-President. It was in this capacity that I attended his Bar Mitzvah little dreaming at that time that he would one day be my son-in-law. Rabbi Goldstein is now Rabbi of the Institutional Synagogue, 37 West 116th Street, which he himself organized in 1917. He is assistant professor of Homiletics in the Yeshiva Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. He is also President of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Their union has been blessed with two sons and a daughter, Simeon Hai, age twelve, Gedalia, age ten, and Josephine Hannah, one month old.

My daughter Bertha is a graduate of Barnard College. On April 10, 1921, she married Dr. Henry A. Rafsky, a noted stomach specialist of high standing in his profession. Among his affiliations are the Lenox Hill and Beth Israel Hospitals and the Hospital of the Home of the Daughters of Jacob. At the latter institution he has been President of the Medical Board since its organization.

Dr. Rafsky has written extensively on the subject of gastroenterology and was formerly instructor of medicine at the N. Y. Post Graduate Hospital. He is associated with the noted stomach specialist, Dr. Max Einhorn. Dr. Rafsky is a strict observer of traditional Orthodox Judaism. Their union has been blessed with two daughters, Ann Esther, five years old, and Jean Carol, two years old.

My youngest daughter Rose, a graduate of Barnard College was married to Albert Wald on February 18, 1923. Mr. Wald is a lawyer and has been practising in New York for some time. He comes of a family descended from a long line of Rabbis renowned for their piety and learning. Like my other sons-in-law he is a strict observer of our traditional Judaism. This union has been blessed with two children, Judith, three years old, and Nachman (Nathaniel), two years old, who was named after my revered father.

It is my prayer to the Almighty that together with all the members of my family, I may be spared for many years to extend my assistance to those educational and philanthropic projects in which I am now engaged, so that it may be possible for me at a future date to add many interesting and significant chapters to this biography, chapters that will be filled with a record of

important achievements for the preservation of traditional Judaism and for the benefit of mankind generally.

In conclusion, I will say that when I left my home town at the age of twenty years, the last words uttered by my parents were, "You are going to America, the land of gold. 'DON'T EXCHANGE YOUR RELIGION FOR GOLD.'" These words have always been ringing in my ears. The command of my parents, I think, has been faithfully carried out by me. In fact, I have sought to do more, that is, to use my gold for the purpose of beautifying and strengthening our religion.



FORTY YEARS OF STRUGGLE  
FOR A PRINCIPLE



## CHAPTER I

### BOYHOOD

HARRY FISCHER retains a vivid memory of his birthplace and boyhood. The little Russian town of Meretz where he first saw the light of day in the middle of the last century was as bleak, drab and uninviting a place as one can well imagine. The town was composed of a motley collection of ill assorted, ramshackle frame dwellings, one and two stories high, with here and there an unsightly factory; stores, where the barest necessities of life might be purchased; unpaved streets, either buried in the snow during the winter or running rivers of mud during the spring and summer.

Such was the outward appearance of Meretz in the middle of the last century. Such is its appearance today. The world has moved on, but Meretz, for hundreds of years, has remained the same.

Add to its external aspects the fact that Meretz is situated nearly fifty miles away from the nearest cities of appreciable size, Grodno, Kovno, and Vilna; that, at the time of which we write, the only means of communication with these cities was by horse and wagon, or by foot—in the long cold winters by sleigh—and one gets a partial idea of the remoteness and inaccessibility of this Russian town.

Meretz was virtually incommunicado with the outside world. Seldom did a newspaper reach its environs. Its population of about fifteen hundred families, for the most part, was born, lived, worked and died without ever setting foot outside its precincts, except those who left for America.

But one problem was presented by life in Meretz. This consisted of the necessity of eking out an existence and it was a problem which faced practically every resident of the town, man,

woman and child, from the day of their births until it was finally settled by their departure for a better world.

About two-thirds of the population of the town was Jewish. The Jews did not fare either better or worse than their Gentile neighbors and lived with them, on the whole, in a state of amity and peace. This was before the days of Russian pogroms and of the persecutions that began with the knout and ended with the grave.

Most of the population existed by supplying each others' needs. They were artisans, mechanics, storekeepers, doing little or no business outside the limits of the town. All were struggling for existence.

It was in this community and under such conditions that Harry Fischel was born on July 19, 1865, the 17th day of Tammuz, 5625.

If his parents, like most of the families in Meretz, were poor, they enjoyed in unusual degree the respect of the community and did their utmost to rear and educate their six children to be God-fearing, self-respecting men and women. Until their son, in later years, sent them money, it is doubtful if the elder Fischel ever had the equivalent of twenty-five American dollars at a single time. Thrift, then, in the Fischel family ceased to be a virtue and became a habit, so that, despite his generous gifts in later years to many causes, Harry Fischel early had instilled into his consciousness the value of every rouble and later of every dollar that he earned, a knowledge quite as valuable from the viewpoint of helpfulness to those charities he was to assist as of practical use to himself.

Despite the poverty against which his parents had ever to combat, there was a distinction about Nachman Fischel, Harry's father, that set him apart and above his neighbors. By trade a cabinet maker, on which vocation he relied for his daily bread, he was yet a man of unusual and marked attainments, although he lived and died without ever going beyond the town limits.

He was noted among his neighbors not alone for his deep piety,

but for his unusual store of practical knowledge of the world, coupled with a native store of wit and keenness of perception that caused him to be much in demand as a local arbiter of disputes and made him a venerated and conspicuous figure in the life of the community.

It was, however, the religious and spiritual side of his father's character that left its deepest impress upon the boy.

Thus, while yet in his teens and before he had come to form any but the most rudimentary outlook on life, the boy received many hours of instruction in the Torah and, as he grew older, gradually came to put the spiritual significance of life above its material side, forming a deep interest in and an abiding attachment for the teachings of traditional Judaism, an interest and devotion that was later to cause him many hours of bitter mental and spiritual conflict, when he was to be put to the test of remaining true to his father's teachings or deserting them to secure monetary advantage.

The instruction and example of his father, the respect in which Nachman was held by his neighbors and men of prominence in the town and beyond it, and the calm, capable, unworried life he led, exercised a remarkable influence upon the boy.

His mother, Hannah Fischel, was a fitting helpmate for her husband. A sturdy, loyal and competent wife, she shared unflinchingly and without complaint the vicissitudes which fell to her lot and maintained withal that nobility of character and demeanor which caused her to be endeared quite as strongly by the people of Meretz as was her husband. She was, moreover, a woman of the deepest piety and helped on every occasion to impart religious instruction and training to her children.

Without the worldly means to indulge in many gifts to the needy she was, nevertheless, charitable in the broadest sense of the term, and continually gave, not alone of her broad and understanding sympathies to the afflicted, but of her time and physical resources, so that it became commonly known in the town that no one had ever appealed to her for aid and been denied.

The marriage of young Fischel's parents was one of those rare human and spiritual relationships contemplated by Holy Writ but seldom in these days met with in real life. It endured for sixty-two years until the death of Nachman in 1897 and, during the whole of these sixty-two years, the husband was never separated from his wife for a longer period than was made necessary on the Sabbath and holidays when they went to the Synagogue.

Never, in all these years that were lived side by side together, amid conditions of strain, anxiety and stress, was a single angry or unkind word spoken by the husband to his wife, or the wife to her husband, a married existence that ran its course from the altar to the grave without a real quarrel or dispute.

What a lesson is here to be found, especially for many Americans of the present generation, who, without fear or reverence for God in their souls, pursue their selfish ways leading to the divorce courts. Divorce was a thing unknown to the pious souls of Meretz with all their lack of modern culture.

Thus it was, in truth, the teachings and example of his parents that caused the boy early to turn his steps toward a life of service to his people and in appreciation of whose influence, Mr. Fischel, at the outset of the talks that finally led to the writing of this biography, remarked:

"Of all the influences which have guided my life, the noble example of goodness and charity which every day was set before me by my father and mother, formed the one outstanding factor in moulding my character and exerted the greatest force in directing all my steps. My strivings for the perpetuation of Orthodox Judaism were inculcated through the teachings of my parents that have ever remained indelibly imprinted on my heart and mind."

It was thus, through his early years, the boy's mind, like the highly sensitized plate of a camera, absorbed the impressions created through his home life and he turned his thoughts in a direction unusual in one so young.

This is possibly best illustrated by the fact that, at the age of



MR. FISCHEL'S PARENTS.



only ten years, he spent some weeks in modelling from wood, with a lowly pen-knife, a miniature replica of the Tabernacle, so accurately designed according to the description in the Scriptures, and so carefully executed, as to excite the wonderment and surprise of the dwellers in the town and to be exhibited in the Synagogue where it drew forth the praise, not alone of the patriarchs of Meretz, but even of the Rabbi.

Through this bit of work, done on his own initiative, the boy developed a taste for the profession he was later to adopt and that was ultimately to bring him success in the business world of the Metropolis of a far off land.

From his tenth to his fifteenth year, Harry Fischel, with other boys of his age, attended the local school, imbibing such limited general knowledge as was contained in the curriculum of the schoolmaster. Needless to say, he supplemented the religious instruction received at home with attendance at the Talmud Torah, but he was always prevented from securing a higher secular education, not alone by reason of his parents' poverty, but because the higher institutions of secular learning required attendance on the Sabbath.

When, in his fifteenth year, it became necessary for him to consider preparation for the future so that he might lend help at home, he hit upon the architect's profession as the one that most interested him. Accordingly, at the age of eighteen, he had mastered the rudiments of this calling.

But now that he had acquired some architectural knowledge, what was he to do with it? The nearest cities, Grodno, Kovno and Vilna, were all many miles away and there was little employment in the town of Meretz where the construction of a new building was of rare occurrence indeed.

The fame of America, its welcome to those from other lands, its equal opportunities held out to all, irrespective of race or creed and the brilliant future it promised to those with determination and character, had even then begun to penetrate to this remote and obscure Russian town. A few of the more hardy and

daring young men of this and surrounding communities had already packed their scanty belongings and, with a few roubles in their pockets, had set forth for this land of hope.

These pioneers had written letters to their relatives and these letters had been handed around for others to read and to marvel at, for they told of fabulous earnings to be made, of a prosperity and freedom wholly foreign to this little town, and of a mode of living that could only be regarded as luxurious, compared with anything they had known before.

These letters gave rise to wholly unexpected thoughts and ambitions in the mind of young Fischel, and he came to feel that by emigrating to America he would find a solution to all the problems which beset him, as contrasted with the dreary outlook presented in Meretz. He did not seriously contemplate the step at this time, however, as he could not bear the thought of separation from his beloved parents.

But destiny has a queer way of making its purposes felt, and of giving expression to its will. While the youth had definitely put aside the longing to emigrate to America, he was suddenly confronted with the early prospect of military service, from which no able bodied Russian youth was exempt, and which meant he would be compelled to spend five years in the army as soon as he reached the age of twenty-one.

Young Fischel did not object to serving his country, even at the cost of a sacrifice to his ambitions, but he did strenuously object to the fact that in the army he would be forced to violate many of the religious principles which had become a sacred necessity to his very being, even to desecrate the Sabbath and partake of forbidden food.

In addition, the pittance in the way of salary he would receive would make it impossible for him to be of any assistance to his parents.

He was the youngest child, his parents expected him to be with them for the remainder of their days. What should he do?

He went to his father and put the situation clearly before

him. He could not, he told him, be false to the teachings which had been instilled in him. There was but one way out, this was for him to seek his future in America. If God blessed him, he would prosper and would be enabled to live in conformity with his religious principles, and, at the same time would be in a position where he could extend assistance to his family.

After much persuasion the youth prevailed, and his father's consent was won. Next, it became necessary to break the news to his mother and this, for all concerned, was an ordeal never to be forgotten. But the aged woman bore the blow with the fortitude that was to be expected of her and, finally, with her eyes full of tears and her hands trembling with emotion, she, too, gave her consent.

It is one thing to reach a determination and another to execute it. America was thousands of miles away by sea and land. It cost money to get there, all of two hundred roubles—in those days about one hundred dollars in American money—and this sum was not to be found. Two hundred roubles, indeed, when an entire family could subsist for a full month on ten roubles!

It seemed as though leaving for America were to be only a chimera of youth's fancy, that, instead would come his dreaded induction into the army and with it an end to all his hopes and his forced abandonment of the tenets of his faith.

But here Divine Providence, the Loving Kindness of the Almighty, intervened and a ray of hope pierced the blackness that enshrouded him.

A terrific fire enveloped the city of Grodno, hundreds of dwellings were razed by the flames, scores of business houses and public dwellings were destroyed or damaged by the blaze, and the virtual rebuilding of the city was required. This was known throughout Russia as the great fire of Grodno and occurred in the year 1883.

Here, at last, was an opportunity for the youthful architect and embryo builder. Hundreds of mechanics were required for the work of reconstruction and these had to be supervised by men

of training in the building crafts, who, likewise, could do their share of manual labor if called upon.

Young Fischel, on learning of the demand for workers, lost no time in setting out for Grodno, determined to turn this trick of fortune to his advantage. Many of the wearisome miles intervening between Grodno and Meretz he was compelled to walk, for others he managed to obtain lifts in farmers' wagons or other vehicles. At night he lay down by the wayside and covered himself with straw.

So well did he represent himself that he at once obtained employment in Grodno as an architect and foreman of construction, a most responsible position for one of his tender years and lack of experience. He gave such satisfaction, however, that he remained in Grodno a year and a half steadily employed, during which time he managed, in addition to maintaining himself and sending money to his parents, to save the tremendous sum of two hundred and fifty roubles.

He returned to his parents' home but a few months before his summons to military service was expected.

The next two weeks were devoted to preparations for the epochal journey which was to change the whole complexion of his life and which, though he could not then foresee it, was to open the way for blessings to himself and others which were even to exceed his parents' fondest hopes. Most of the time during these days, which sped with amazing quickness, was spent with his mother whom he tried to comfort as best he could over the imminence of the separation that was to come.

Of the two hundred and fifty roubles he had saved, the dutiful son gave fifty roubles to his parents, a sum sufficient to insure them against want for many weeks to come or, until he felt confident, he should be able to send them further funds from his earnings in America.

At last the day for parting came and the young man, true to his teachings, went to the good Rabbi of Meretz to receive his blessing, which was gladly and fervently bestowed. He then took a

sorrowful farewell of his parents and, in turn, received their blessing and advice, together with their final words of admonition which were:

“When you reach the golden land, do not exchange your religion for gold,”—words which to this day he has never forgotten and which, sooner than he expected, he was to be called upon to put into practice.

Thus, with only the clothes upon his back and bearing his prayer shawl and phylacteries under his arm, this youth of twenty set out to conquer in a strange land.

Yet, so sincere was his belief that he would be befriended by the God of his Fathers, whose watchfulness would ever be exerted over him, that he set forth proud and unafraid, with a mighty resolution not only to succeed, but to be true to that faith and to those precepts which he had been taught from his cradle were indispensable to a life of virtue and honor.

## CHAPTER II

### AMERICA

THE America to which this youth of twenty journeyed by slow and laborious stages, husbanding his every penny, carrying with him bread and a bit of herring to sustain himself on shipboard, lest he partake of food that was not kosher, was not the America of today. Young Fischel made the journey by land to Hamburg and there embarked on the now forgotten, but then mighty steamship, Raitia, using almost the last of his resources to pay his passage in the steerage. The voyage consumed many days and was a wearisome one, confined as he was in close and uncomfortable quarters with others not less poor and forlorn than himself.

Jewish immigration had only just set in in large volume, for there were then no restrictive immigration laws to stem the tide or to deny opportunity to all who sought the hospitality of America's shores, here to find new courage and new hope.

Had the restrictive immigration laws of the present day been then in force, Harry Fischel would not have been the only man from his immediate native environment to be denied admittance, but a host of men who have contributed much in the way of good citizenship to the land of their adoption would also have been barred. From the little town of Meretz, alone, came then and in after years, a score of men who have won prominence and have made their contribution to America's greatness in many fields.

A few of these men, some of whom were classmates of Harry Fischel as a boy, may here be mentioned as illustrating the valuable human material which immigration laws, founded upon arbitrary quotas or geographical and racial considerations, inevitably must bar.

Some of the landsmen of Harry Fischel who, like himself, were transmuted into true and stalwart Americans, are: Professor Max

Margolis of Dropsey College: Judge David Lourie, of the Superior Court of the State of Massachusetts: Messrs. Frank and Cedar, owners of the great Pittsburgh department store that bears their name: Isidore Ruby, Boston Councilman: Bernard Ratkovsky, the New York furrier: and, finally, the venerable Rabbi M. S. Margolies, dean of Orthodox Rabbis in New York, who was a close friend of Mr. Fischel's father and at one time Rabbi of Meretz. There are also many others who have won distinction as Supreme Court Judges, Congressmen, State Legislators, in business and in the professions in many parts of the United States, but whom it is difficult for Mr. Fischel to identify for the reason that they have changed the names by which they were known to him in Russia, for names that have been Americanized to be more easily remembered and pronounced.

On a bitter cold day, late in December of 1885, a day on which the rigors of the elements reminded him of his native Russia, Harry Fischel found himself at Castle Garden, the Battery, where immigrants were then landed. There were few formalities to be gone through at the hands of the immigration authorities, it being necessary only to show a clean bill of health. There was no literacy test to be undergone and no need even to examine his baggage, for he had none.

The youth had but sixty cents remaining of the two hundred roubles with which he had set out from Meretz, plus the clothes upon his back, but if he was short of cash, he was long on vigorous health and an abundance of determination.

In the voyage across the ocean he had not neglected, with his accustomed studious habits, to utilize his time to advantage. Understanding no word of English when he got on shipboard, he realized this deficiency would have to be overcome as speedily as possible, if he were to procure work without delay, and, accordingly, he contrived to borrow an English and German dictionary which he pored over for hours at a time, with the result that, when he landed he had mastered enough of the language to inquire his way and to make his simple wants known.

He had with him the address of a Landsman at 77 Essex Street, in that part of the lower East Side where already the Jews from the old world had congregated and by one means or another contrived to earn a livelihood. Approaching a policeman for directions, he was told to take the elevated railroad to Canal and Allen Streets. There, at the foot of the elevated stairs, he received the first shock of his career in his new found home when he was addressed in his own tongue by a perfect stranger. The man evidently had no difficulty in sensing from the boy's garb and demeanor that he had only lately landed. Why the stranger should take the trouble to address him, the youth could not understand, but it was with all the feeling of delight with which a person greets one of his own race in a strange land, that he prepared to engage in friendly conversation with him.

What was his consternation and surprise when the stranger, without indulging in preliminaries, turned to him and said:

"Young man, you have just landed in the great city of New York, where all the opportunities are opened to you, but if you want to succeed, you must forget about God and your religion and especially about the Sabbath and dietary laws. You must work every day including the Sabbath and eat what you can get, for God has been left on the other side of the ocean."

So great was the shock which these words produced in the mind of Harry Fischel, that he could only conclude that one who would utter such blasphemies must be a lunatic and he fled precipitately from him. Nor did he ever set eyes upon this man again or learn of his fate.

"How could a man be a Jew and not be struck down by the Almighty for his wickedness, if he did not observe the Sabbath and keep the dietary laws?" he pondered. For Harry Fischel knew but one kind of Jew, the kind his parents exemplified.

The mental and moral gymnastics by which Jews have of late years divided themselves, in America and to some extent abroad, into the three classifications of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform were then and still are, inexplicable to Harry Fischel. He



MR. FISCHEL AT THE AGE OF TWENTY WHEN  
HE CAME TO AMERICA.



cannot conceive of a man professing a religion and not following its teachings to the letter. To him, such a course of action is like inviting down the direct wrath of the Almighty.

In the little town of Meretz, he knew only Jews and Christians, each was faithful to the religion in which he was born or else was regarded as a heretic. There was no middle road, no acceptance or rejection of this or that ritual or dogma because it was either pleasing or distasteful to the individual, no possible modification of the laws for Sabbath observance that did not constitute desecration, no ignoring of the equally stringent laws of diet for the reason that they were difficult to follow or because other food was more readily available. If one could not secure Kosher food, he went without eating; if it were necessary to labor on the Sabbath to obtain employment, then one remained jobless.

Had he, indeed, come all these thousands of miles with the chief object of enjoying the liberty of worshiping God in his own way, only, as this stranger had said, to find himself denied this right: to find America, instead a land where there was no God, a land ruled by Mammon alone? His mind failed to conceive such a condition, the stranger must indeed be crazed.

It was only in after years that he learned such men were employed to wean away the Jew from his religious heritage, to subvert or destroy his faith in the interests of wordly gain or in the mistaken belief that any other religion can supplant in the true Jewish soul that which has been handed down to him by his fathers. Of the effects of such proselyting, Harry Fischel declares:

“The good Jew will not sell his religious heritage and a bad Jew will always make a bad Christian.”

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY STRUGGLES

HARRY FISCHEL was at once confronted with the task of finding work. The pleasant distractions he might have enjoyed in looking about the great city were not to be experienced with but sixty cents in his pockets. Enjoying the temporary hospitality of comparative strangers and, above all, with his aged parents waiting anxiously at home to receive news of his progress and his financial aid, his entire thoughts were centered upon obtaining employment.

For the next several days, until his few remaining pennies were exhausted, he utilized his time in making inquiries as to where it was most likely his services would be in demand and then set forth in search of work. Even with the confidence he possessed in his own abilities, he found the task a difficult one.

His greatest handicap was lack of knowledge of the language, for there were at this time no Jewish architects, or at least he knew of none, and he was compelled to seek employment in the offices of Gentiles. Even this proved unavailing, for after walking the streets for several days, making countless applications, he found no one who was willing to give him the opportunity for which he so earnestly prayed. What architect, indeed, had use for a greenhorn immigrant boy of twenty who could not even understand the instructions that might be given him? Why, furthermore, should a Jew from Russia be given the chance of such an apprenticeship when there were many native American youths to be had? It was such arguments as these with which he was rebuffed. It was, in fact, during his first week in America that he made application for citizenship papers.

Finding that his expectations of at once securing an opening with an architect were to be denied him, he did not permit his

disappointment to prevent his continuing the search for any work that might bring him a living, and finally was successful in securing a job with a boss carpenter, as assistant to the foreman, a place that paid the munificent wage of three dollars a week. It had, however, the advantage of permitting young Fischel to use his training as an architect to some extent, for the foreman had had no such training and was only too glad to take advantage of the knowledge of blue prints and plans possessed by his youthful assistant.

The entire sum of his first week's wages, the young man sent to his parents from whom he had now been separated for many weeks and whom, he felt sure, were in need of even this slight assistance. In order that he might be enabled to do this, he arranged with the family with whom he lived to extend him credit for his board and lodging until a later date. From this time on, the young man never failed to send his mother and father a monthly remittance of at least ten roubles, or about five dollars in American money, so budgetting his expenses and living on such fare as to make this possible, no matter how small his earnings were.

While he worked steadily at his job, which occupied twelve of his waking hours, the youth was far from satisfied with the progress he was making and kept his mind steadily fixed on the main incentive of his life at that time, namely to eventually procure work with an architect, so that he might be able to advance in his profession. The carpenter by whom he was employed, was engaged solely in alterations and jobbing, and it was not this sort of occupation, but the opportunity to create, to engage in the construction of new buildings, that fired the young man's imagination and to do which he was more than ever determined he would find the way.

In spite of his long hours he decided that the only course by which he could hope to better his prospects was to attend night school, where, besides achieving a greater mastery of the English language, he might also broaden his architectural knowledge. For

the next six months, therefore, his hours of labor were sixteen a day, twelve hours with his employer, two spent in the night school and two preparing his work for the following day.

At the expiration of these six months, it seemed at last his diligence was to be rewarded, for he finally came upon a firm of architects that was ready to engage him at ten dollars a week, a figure that sounded princely indeed.

But once again his hopes were to be blasted for, in connection with this position he learned it would be necessary for him to work on the Sabbath and he was instantly reminded of the words of the stranger to whom he had spoken on his arrival in New York, and who told him that, in order to succeed in America, he must forget God and forget his religion.

What then was he to do? There was set before him the opportunity for which he had so long searched and had striven so hard, the opportunity to take up seriously and with every prospect of success, the architectural profession; there was also presented to him the opportunity of making his financial status secure, for what would not this increase in pay from three to ten dollars a week mean both to him and to his aged parents?

How was he to resist this offer, how remain true to all that he had been taught? As he pondered over the problem, there suddenly resounded in his ears, as though the words were again spoken directly to him, the parting injunction of his parents: "Do not exchange your religion for money," and with this recollection, all the strength of his early resolutions returned to him. Peace came to his soul as he decided to refuse the proffered employment and continue in his present place.

It was not long after reaching this decision, that the young man was called to face what came in the nature of a calamity.

Arriving one day in the middle of the month of July at his employer's place of business, he found the establishment closed, a notice of bankruptcy posted upon the door and he, in consequence, without employment. He was also practically without funds for he had been able to save but little from his wages except

the sum he had sent monthly to his parents. His own plight caused him but trifling worry or concern, compared with the thought of his father and mother cut off from his help on which they chiefly relied.

How was this tragedy to be averted?

For many days and nights he walked the streets communing with himself and uttering prayers to the Almighty that he might receive the strength to resist temptation. Meanwhile, he sought by every means which he could think of to obtain employment. His every effort proved fruitless until,—purposely omitting mention of the Sabbath—he succeeded in obtaining a position with a firm of architects, trusting to the hope that after he had been with them a few days and had made himself as useful as possible, he might obtain the privilege of working five days a week for much less pay than he was promised for six days.

He went to work one Monday morning for his new employers, Schneider and Herter, whose offices, by some strange coincidence, were situated in the Bible House. Never had he found work more congenial, more to his liking, having in it the possibilities for promotion and service opening to him a new vista of long deferred hopes.

So happy was he in his work that Friday came on wings, almost before he could believe it. Early Friday afternoon he approached his employer with the request that he might be absent on the next day, Saturday, making the proposition that a portion of his pay be deducted in view of the arrangement.

His request was immediately and firmly denied, his employer flatly declaring: "If you don't come tomorrow, you need not come on Monday." It seemed as though God had decided to give him another test of his devotion to his religious principles and his ability to withstand temptation.

Again Harry Fischel's world went crashing about his ears. "Never," so he declares, "shall I forget that Friday night!"

Was he to give up this position, the first he had been able to secure that offered him the slightest prospect of advancement in

his profession: were all his hopes to be dashed, the comfort of his parents jeopardized, or was he not justified in succumbing to the tempter's voice and returning the following day to his work?

He spent a sleepless night considering these questions and, finally, as morning dawned, he reached a compromise with his conscience. He would not give up his position, but, before going to work he would attend services in the synagogue of the Congregation Scharey Torah, Hester and Orchard Streets, to which he was in the habit of going every Saturday.

Accordingly he arose at five o'clock, carefully attired himself in his Sabbath clothes, intending later to change them for his every day apparel, and set forth for the early services.

Once in the Synagogue, the sight of the several hundred worshippers; his conviction that, despite their poverty, none of these could be prevailed upon to desecrate the Sabbath for profit; the thought of generations of his forebears who had remained true to their faith; the realization that he would be the first of his family to break God's law, all these thoughts crowded into his consciousness while, at the same time, he was unable to force from his mind his fears as to what should become of his parents deprived of his support.

At the conclusion of the services, still confused and undecided, the young man went to the Ark and there silently prayed for God's guidance. Even his fervent supplication remained unanswered and he stumbled into the street, weak from the ordeal through which he was passing; intending to return to his lodgings, change to his work clothes and proceed to the office of the architect.

On his way and when he had arrived at the corner of Hester and Essex Streets, at that time the busiest corner on the entire East Side, he was forcibly struck with the observation that, as far as his eye could reach there was not a single store open, not even a solitary push cart to be seen. On the other hand, the street was filled with men, women and children in their Sabbath dress, none having thoughts of business, each spending the day in

harmony with its holiness. Again he asked himself, would not his parents die of shock could they but know the step he contemplated?

Suddenly, although the day was in mid-August and the heat was stifling, he trembled as with the ague. A chill went through every fibre of his being, as though he were confronted with the biting winds of January. At the same time a strange sensation attacked his heart and he was unable to move. It seemed as though he were paralyzed and he would have fallen, had not his body been supported by a friendly wall.

When with difficulty he recovered himself, his decision had been reached. The terrible temptation of the past few hours had been thrown off, and he knew that neither then nor later would it ever be possible for him to desecrate the Sabbath. His prayer to the Almighty in the synagogue had been answered by a mysterious manifestation of the Divine Power.

Finally, he returned to his abode with slow and faltering steps but with a strange and perfect peace and happiness in his heart, as though he had been born anew or some horrible spectre which had haunted him had been forever removed. The doubts which had assailed him were gone. His way was made clear and for the remainder of that memorable Sabbath, he forgot all his temporal troubles and gave himself over to the gratification of having resisted the greatest temptation he had ever known.

The following day he dispatched a letter to his parents informing them of the spiritual conflict through which he had passed and asking them if, in view of their poverty, he had decided aright.

Only a month passed before he had their answer which read: "Not only are we satisfied even to suffer hunger, but we are also willing to sell the pillows from under our old heads to send you money to pull you through to the time when you will succeed in getting a position that will not compel you to desecrate the Sabbath."

On the next day, Monday, young Fischel went again to the

offices of Schneider and Herter to renew his plea that he be permitted to work five days a week, even at one half the salary they had agreed to pay him. Not only was his request again refused, but payment was withheld for the labor he had already performed.

It is difficult to picture the trials and deprivations the young man was compelled to undergo in the next three months. It is impossible for the American of today to conceive of a human being existing in such manner as this youth existed and, through it all, losing neither courage nor high resolve.

When the young man was turned away from the doors of Schneider and Herter to renew his ceaseless search for work, his entire possessions consisted of two dollars and a half. The frugality he had practiced in the past he at once foresaw must now be doubled and, accordingly, he sought to reduce his living expenses to a point that almost reached the dimensions of a cipher.

The Landsman with whom he lodged and who possessed a true Jewish heart, took pity on the boy and out of his almost next to nothing of this world's goods, managed to give young Fischel a place to sleep and three cups of coffee a day, this charity being augmented on Friday evenings with a plate of soup.

But life cannot be sustained on a single plate of soup a week and to supplement what his kindly benefactor contributed, young Fischel purchased daily, for three cents, a loaf of bread which he broke into three pieces, each piece, with the cup of coffee he received, constituting a meal.

On a few occasions he purchased either a cent's worth of cheese or a cent's worth of herring, and this expenditure he regarded in the nature of a real extravagance, only justified because it reduced to some extent the pangs of hunger from which he was never wholly free.

By thus arranging his fare and thanks to the goodness of the man who sheltered him, the youth's expenditures for three months, from August to October, when he again found work, did

not go above twenty-five cents or at the utmost thirty cents a week.

During these months, when not walking the streets seeking work, the young man attended Cooper Union Institute, continuing to satisfy his thirst for a greater knowledge of architecture and gradually acquiring more proficiency in the English language.

It was in mid October of 1886 that the first rift in the clouds appeared. It was at this time that early one morning the youth received word from a carpenter and builder named Feldman, asking him to call at his shop at 31 Orchard Street. Feldman offered him a position as foreman, carrying with it the responsibility of superintending the work of a number of men. So overwhelmed with joy was he at the prospect of work that he did not even think to inquire what pay he was to receive, and it was only at the end of his first week that he was told he was to receive seven dollars, and was promised an increase later, should he give satisfaction to Mr. Feldman and his wife, whom he also was to assist in her domestic duties.

Let us for a moment consider the conditions of employment the young man was called upon to meet and contrast them with conditions as they exist today.

His day's labor began at six in the morning when he was expected to be at the Feldman home to bring up coal and wood from the cellar and to start the fire. At seven he had to be on whatever building job he was engaged upon to start the men at their several tasks and there he remained until nightfall when Mr. Feldman would come around to note the day's progress and to say, "Boys, you may go home." Sometimes this was at seven in the evening and at other times it was as late as ten o'clock, but no matter how late the hour, no one thought of stirring from the job or of ceasing his labors until released by the "Boss".

But young Fischel's labor was not ended with this release for the others, he had still to return to his employer's home, make a report of the day's work and arrange the assignments of the men for the following day, and when all of this was accomplished he

yet had to bank the fire for the night. Only then could he gratify himself with the thought that "he had nothing to do till tomorrow."

And he remained in this position for more than a year, that is from October 1886 to November 1887, winning, during this period, increases in salary that finally brought his pay to eleven dollars a week instead of the seven at which he had begun.

These days, as he recalls them were among the happiest of his life and neither the long hours nor the heavy tasks he was called upon to perform, could diminish his satisfaction that he was able to increase the sum sent monthly to his parents, allowing them for the first time to live in comparative comfort; that he was permitted to keep the Sabbath holy and that all the time he was gaining valuable experience that he would be able later to use with profit and advantage.



MR. FISCHER AS A BRIDEGROOM AT THE AGE OF  
TWENTY-TWO WITH MRS. FISCHER.



## CHAPTER IV

### ROMANCE

It was quite natural that Harry Fischel, who had by this time been in the country for a year and a half and had attained his majority, his twenty-second birthday not being far off, should, on occasions have been affected by a poignant feeling of lonesomeness. While his duties, occupying as they did most of his waking hours on five days of the week, left him little time for introspection, yet there were many hours during the long and bitter struggle he had experienced, when he yearned for human sympathy and companionship.

It is true that from time to time the young man met a Landsman from his own town or province, and sometimes had brought to him direct word of how his beloved parents were faring, with a message of blessing from them. But this only accentuated his loneliness and intensified his desire to unburden his heart to a kind and compassionate listener.

It was about this time, in May of the year 1887 to be exact, that, at the home of a mutual friend, he was introduced to Miss Jane Brass. Aside from the quiet dignity of the girl and her kindly disposition, an immediate bond of sympathy was developed between the young man and woman by reason of the fact that she hailed from the town of Eishishock, not far from Meretz and that, while they had never met in their native land, there was much in common between them.

It was, therefore, not to be wondered at that they were at once drawn to each other by a strong mutual attraction, for the young woman could not help but admire the youth who had gone through so much, who revealed to her his ambitions and whose kindness and courtesy were only matched by the fire of his indomitable purpose.

She, too, was lonely, although she had about her in New York, many members of her immediate family, a family of distinction, learning and piety. She possessed, furthermore, that same religious zeal and love for her faith that was the all consuming trait of the youth at her side and, with him, her hopes for the future were to be of service to mankind and to advance the cause of Judaism in the land of her adoption.

Miss Brass' father was noted for his learning and devoutness and had committed to memory one half of the entire Talmud. Her grandfather was the celebrated Rabbi Alexander Sisskind, author of several books read throughout the world and held in high esteem and reverence as a man and a Rabbi. Her brother, Rubin Brass, is now a Rabbi in Wisokedvah, Vilna, and the famous Hebrew writer, Joseph Klausner, is her cousin.

Thus, the young woman possessed in both her antecedents and upbringing all those qualities most likely to appeal to the young man and to strengthen and encourage all that was best in his own character.

It is by no means remarkable, therefore, that after a few meetings the respect and admiration each had for the other ripened into a stronger sentiment and within the space of several weeks developed into a love that has endured through forty years of married life. They met in May, 1887, and on July Fourth, became engaged.

Miss Brass had emigrated to America two years earlier than her fiancee. Like him, she had been compelled to earn her living and had worked as a dressmaker, managing to accumulate the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars, whereas, up to this time, young Fischel had only been able to set aside forty-seven dollars in savings.

Miss Brass was not above certain vanities of her sex and she desired for a betrothal gift a gold watch and chain, the cost of which proved to be fifty dollars. Toward this, young Fischel contributed his entire fortune of forty-seven dollars, his fiancee making up the remaining three dollars needed for the purchase

from her own money. To this day, the watch and chain is in her possession and is being jealously guarded by her to be passed on in future years as a priceless family heirloom.

The courtship and betrothal days of these two bore little resemblance to this period in the lives of our young people of the present day. There was neither time nor money for entertainment and amusements, there were no theatres, dances, flowers or confections, but these things were neither desired or missed. Despite their respective labors and duties they contrived, as young people in love will ever contrive, to be much in each others' company and in the mere fact of being together they found an enjoyment and happiness neither had ever known before.

At last the young man had some one in whom he could confide, always assured of sympathy, interest and the understanding helpfulness a good woman is ever able to impart to the man she loves. Their hours together were mainly spent in planning with the Almighty's aid for the future. They decided that, in after years and as soon as there was no longer occasion for anxiety as to how they were to procure the necessaries of life, they would devote themselves to communal work and to activities that should more strongly entrench the principles of Orthodox Judaism in this new land.

By late fall, the two felt they had enough money to set the wedding day and November 26, which fell on Thanksgiving Day that year, was chosen for this momentous event in their lives. It was decided to hold the nuptials in the American Star Hall at 165 East Broadway, which was forthwith engaged for the purpose at the then considerable sum of twenty-five dollars. This figure included also the cost of refreshments, comprising tongue sandwiches, fruit and lastly a barrel of beer, which beverage was regarded in those days as an indispensable adjunct to a wedding celebration.

When these arrangements had been perfected, however, and when even the invitations for the ceremony had been extended to the friends and relatives of both bride and groom, Mr. Fischel's

mind began to be filled with misgivings as to how he might be able to discharge the new responsibilities he was about to assume.

A good part of the savings of both young people had been invested in furnishings for their home, consisting of three rooms on the top floor of number five Chrystie Street, the rental of which was eleven dollars a month. The young man worried greatly as to the contingency of losing his position and how he would then manage to care for his aged parents abroad, and still support his home, for he realized he could not ask his young wife to live as he had lived when misfortune overtook him.

Would he again be confronted with the old problem of being called upon to desecrate the Sabbath if he would fulfill his obligations to those he loved? These thoughts weighed heavily upon him and caused him to wonder if, after all, he had done right to ask this girl to face the prospect of poverty which he gloomily conjured up in his mind as none too certain not to be realized. His entire future, he felt, hung on the very slight thread by which he was attached to his present position and which he knew could be easily broken by the first breath of hard times or a slack season.

This worry, which he kept to himself, was nevertheless reflected in his face and put a decided damper on the happiness he would otherwise have been permitted to enjoy. It was not long before Miss Brass perceived that something was wrong. It was impossible for him to conceal from his betrothed his thoughts and fears, for the slightest shadow which crossed his mind was intuitively apparent to her.

Finally she frankly told him of her suspicion that he was withholding something and urged that he make known to her what it was that was distressing him. When he had complied, glad of the opportunity to unburden his heart, she took his head in her hands and with the utmost tenderness and sympathy, replied:

"My dear, don't worry. Should misfortune come to us through the loss of your position, I will gladly live on three dollars a week and pay our rent of eleven dollars by taking in a boarder, if need

be. But my heart tells me that we are to be blessed by the Almighty and that He will show us the way to carry out our plans for the sake of our religion, for which you have already made such sacrifices."

While he was greatly comforted by these words and by the knowledge they conveyed that his beloved would stand by him in the face of adversity, he was not completely reassured. He decided he must not rely on miracles from Above for aid but upon himself and must so plan his future as to insure himself against loss of his employment and which he still could not help but feel was a possibility by no means remote.

After many sleepless nights spent in consideration of the problem, the idea finally occurred to him that he might approach Mr. Feldman, tell of his approaching marriage and suggest that his employer give him a year's contract at nine dollars a week, instead of the eleven he was receiving, in return for which reduction in pay he would be guaranteed steady work for this period. His employer unhesitatingly consented to these terms.

The youth was overjoyed at the prompt acceptance of his proposal and his pleasure was heightened when Feldman remarked that, inasmuch as business was slow, he might take two weeks' vacation with pay as his wedding present. With this good news he hurried to his fiancée's side, and a day or two later the wedding was solemnized with the Feldmans among the guests at the happy event.

Now the young man's cup was filled to overflowing, never had he or his bride known such bliss as in the days immediately following their marriage, and the two weeks' vacation given the husband was largely devoted to helping his wife arrange their home. They felt indeed they were the happiest couple in all America, if not in the world, and it seemed no cloud could come to mar their perfect joy.

But in this they were mistaken, for their honeymoon was not yet at an end when the direst forebodings of the husband were realized and when not only was he once more put to the severest

test of his devotion to his religious principles, but his young wife was called upon to share this test with him.

His two weeks' vacation over, he returned to Feldman to report for work. What was his amazement and chagrin when he was informed by his employer there was no work and he had better seek another position.

This information came to him with the effect of a thunderbolt. When he finally realized that he was dismissed, he felt as though every prop had been removed from under him. It was a rude shattering of all his hopes and ambitions. The bright new world into which he had so lately been ushered came tumbling in havoc about him. All his doubts and fears returned. How could he have been so rash as to enter into marriage when he could not even support himself and with his parents still dependent upon him?

With slow and dejected steps and crestfallen countenance he re-returned to his home to be greeted at the threshold by his wife. It was not necessary for him to tell her what had happened. She read the news at a glance and immediately exclaimed: "You have been discharged!"

In a voice of deepest tenderness, love and sympathy, a voice that at the same time betokened her resolution and courage, she added, "My dear, don't worry, everything is for the best. You will now have the opportunity to start in business for yourself and I will help you in every way that lies in my power. I will keep my promise. We will live on three dollars a week and take in a boarder to help us pay the rent."

With these words ringing in his ears, and the note of strength and confidence, sacrifice and affection they sounded, the young man could not help but steel himself to meet the future, whatever it might bring, with a spirit of determination equal to that of his loyal help-meet, who, though married only two weeks, would not allow discouragement to overwhelm her, despite the ominous outlook with which the couple was confronted.

The winter of 1887-1888 which they now faced, with but little saved and without employment, was one of the severest on record.

It was the winter of the great blizzard of March 12, 1888, still vividly remembered by all who were living at that time and which, coming at the end of a long siege of bitter cold and hard times, laid the city paralyzed and inert beneath its mountains of snow.

It was a winter that tried men's souls yet through it all, the shipwrecked bride and groom managed to live and to be content in the love and peace each contributed to the other. From December until July, Harry Fischel fruitlessly tramped the streets, in search of work, until finally their money gave out and they were compelled to pawn, not only the watch and chain that had constituted the betrothal present, but the watch the husband carried and every other article of value they possessed.

Through all these long and weary months that contained not a single ray of sunshine, the young man held firm to his resolve to seek no work that should cause him to violate the Sabbath and in this resolution he was supported by his wife who repeatedly expressed her faith that this was the last great test of fidelity to his religious principles to which her husband would be put and that, should he triumph over his present temptation, the turning point would be reached, their needs would be supplied and peace would come to them. As she predicted, so it came to pass.

## CHAPTER V

### FIRST BUSINESS SUCCESSES

DURING the months when Mr. Fischel hunted in vain for work and when the future seemed the darkest, his wife had never ceased to urge that he go in business for himself. Several times contracts had been offered to him but always his lack of capital with which to purchase needed material had served as an insurmountable obstacle.

Finally on a pleasant morning in July the tide turned and he was asked by the late Mr. Newman Cowen, a glass dealer, who had been a customer of his former employer, Feldman, to estimate on the cost of a large job, namely raising the roof of the building occupied by Cowen at Canal and Mulberry Streets. Many contractors, including Feldman, regarded the work so difficult that they had refused to figure on it.

Mr. Fischel informed Cowen that he had no capital with which to engage in such an undertaking, but the manufacturer replied that if his price was right, he would arrange a credit for him. Mr. Fischel spent that entire day in working out an estimate. The next morning, considerably to his surprise, this was accepted by Cowen, who, giving him his check for two hundred and fifty dollars, took him to the Mechanics and Traders' Bank, then at the Bowery and Broome Street, where Mr. Cowen opened an account in young Fischel's name, his first bank account, at the same time arranging a further credit of two hundred and fifty dollars for him.

With this sum at his command, Mr. Fischel entered upon the work which took nearly five months to complete. So well had he computed the cost that he not only made a comfortable living during this period but was able to redeem all the articles he had pledged in the pawn shop and also to save two hundred and

fifty dollars in cash, besides providing with greater liberality for his parents.

Even more valuable to him than these considerations was the fact that he succeeded in establishing such a good name that he no longer had difficulty in obtaining credit from those in the building material line, so that he was enabled to undertake many additional contracts of considerable size and importance and in less than a year he had managed to save the sum of two thousand five hundred dollars. He was now fairly launched in business and his mind turned to bigger things and he determined to engage in building on his own account. The story of the next few years reads like a fairy tale.

The lower East Side of those days harbored most of the city's Jewish population which, however, probably did not exceed 200,000 in all. The families were huddled together each occupying at most a few rooms in four and five story tenement buildings, erected on plots 25 x 100, some of them ancient structures, others hurriedly put up to meet the need for housing which this influx of aliens had created. Virtually all of these buildings were the same as to type and plan and number of rooms to a floor, and all lacked every semblance of modern convenience and sanitary safeguards, with a minimum of light and air, as at this time there were no laws regulating tenement house construction. The few families that could afford to do so lived in private houses.

Harry Fischel, with his knowledge of architecture, gained both through his studies and practical experience, decided that he could improve on these factory fashioned tenements, all restricted to the same sized plots of ground. There were at this time many irregularly shaped lots on the East Side which had gone begging because of the inability of the builders of that day to see how they could be utilized, plots 40 by 100, or 30 by 70, and even plots of odder dimensions. These Mr. Fischel learned he could purchase cheaply and with his ability to draw plans, an ability possessed by few builders of those days, he found he could use these little desired pieces of ground to advantage.

Thus, he was the first builder in New York to depart from the stereotyped ideas of tenement construction, from stock plans. Besides showing how irregularly shaped plots could be utilized, he was able to introduce many novel features in his buildings of benefit to those who were to live in them. These conveniences procured their ready sale when completed.

But he went to further lengths than this in his efforts to be of benefit to the community, for he was largely instrumental in getting the city to adopt its first sanitary code related to tenements and insuring the dwellers therein greater convenience and safeguards to their health, not alone in the matter of light and air, but in relation to plumbing, fire escapes, stairways and cellars, matters that, up to this time, had received little consideration from the authorities. In order to accomplish these things he sought out the then Tammany leader of the East Side, the late John F. Ahearn, whom he convinced of the desirability of these reforms and whose aid toward securing their enactment into law he was able to enlist.

With the two thousand five hundred dollars he had saved, his first operation was the purchase of a parcel of land at 168 Clinton Street on which, in five months, he completed a building that he was able to sell at a profit of five thousand dollars. But his establishment as the first successful Jewish builder on the East Side was fraught with much larger significance than the individual rewards for his enterprise and energy that he, himself, obtained.

His lead which, of course, was soon followed by others, resulted in opening an entirely new field for Jewish labor and almost immediately there was developed a demand for Jewish mechanics and artisans in every branch of the building industry. With this demand there followed at once the organization of Jewish trades unions, for there were, unfortunately, many employers who demanded half a day's work on the Sabbath.

Mr. Fischel's principles as to Sabbath observance went far deeper than merely refusing to work himself on that day, his religious code held it equally wicked to cause others to work and

he at once met the problem, not only by closing down the operations on his own buildings, but by setting an example for others by paying hundreds of men the wage they would have obtained by working the half day Saturday, in order that they might resist the temptation to desecrate the day.

Not only then, but in later years, when he came to build on a very extensive scale, it is Mr. Fischel's pride that not a single Jew has ever worked on the Sabbath on any operation on which he has been engaged or in which he has been interested.

The three years following his first building enterprise were marked by unusual success. He built and sold in this period fifteen large tenement houses on the East Side, having the foresight, however, to dispose of all his holdings prior to the financial panic of 1891 which found him with only one building in his possession, a structure at Jefferson and Madison Streets, and that was free and clear of mortgages, principally for the reason that in those troublous financial times, it was difficult to borrow money on the security of real estate.

With the panic at an end, Mr. Fischel sold this remaining building for seventy-five thousand dollars cash and with this money at once renewed his building operations on a still larger scale, so that by 1900 he owned a number of tenements that brought him a large annual income.

This rise, in a little more than thirteen years, from a condition of direst poverty to one of affluence, caused Mr. Fischel and his wife to raise their voices in thankfulness to the Almighty. They were both firmly convinced that the blessings thus showered upon them were directly due to their loyalty to Orthodox Jewish tradition, and to the manner in which the young man had resisted the manifold temptations placed before him, in order, both believed, to test his courage and strength of character.

## CHAPTER VI

### EARLY COMMUNAL ACTIVITIES

INURED as Mr. Fischel had been to privation and even want, accustomed to the most rigorous self-denial, the sudden, almost miraculous, acquirement of what for those days was considerable wealth, might easily have been expected to turn the young man's head. It might either have caused him to seek a soft and easy life, given over to the enjoyment of material pleasures or, as is frequently the case, acted as an incentive to greater efforts toward the accumulation of a still larger fortune to the exclusion of the higher purposes of life.

In the case of Mr. Fischel, however, he regarded the prosperity which had come to him as a direct answer to his prayers and considered that it imposed a definite obligation upon him to express his gratitude in good deeds.

While he was not unmindful of the desirability of this world's goods and while he continued to strive to increase his holdings and to make more secure his fortune, it was mainly with the desire to place himself in a position where he might devote himself with greater zeal to his religion and might have more time to be of service to others.

Thus, long before he had acquired even a modest competence and while he still was compelled to labor both with his hands and with his head to earn a livelihood for his family, his thoughts were concentrated upon the needs of the community. While yet a poor man and with his most bitter struggles still fresh in his memory, Mr. Fischel began upon a career of communal activity that was destined to closely connect him with virtually every important Jewish religious, educational and philanthropic movement to be initiated in New York in the ensuing years.

True to the courtship understanding and pact of the young couple, that, once blessed by the Almighty with the means of a livelihood, they would immediately devote a goodly portion of both their time and money for the benefit of the community at large, the Fischels lost no time in so doing.

A year following their marriage, they moved from their first home at 5 Chrystie Street to 55 Norfolk Street, which was directly opposite the Congregation Beth Hamaedrash Hagodol, the building of which had only just been purchased from a Methodist Church. Mr. Fischel joined this congregation and here secured his first opportunity to be of service by assisting in the work of reconstruction of the building for synagogue purposes, giving voluntarily and without charge of his time and experience.

So highly appreciated by the members of the Congregation were Mr. Fischel's labors, that at the first meeting he was elected to the Board of Trustees and a year later was chosen Vice President which office he continued to hold until 1902 when he moved to Yorkville and when he was succeeded as Vice President by Mr. Morris Goldstein of Blessed Memory, the father of this editor. Mr. Fischel continued, however, to serve as a member of the Board of Trustees.

Mr. Fischel at this time, as later in life, was possessed of an insatiable desire to live up to the precepts that had been impressed upon his conscience by his parents and he was continually searching for opportunities whereby he might serve his fellows, devoting to this ideal the same energy and resourcefulness that he had previously shown in overcoming the obstacles and trials that had confronted him in the effort to earn a living.

In 1903, two years after his first connection with the Congregation Beth Hamaedrash Hagodol and just at the beginning of his early business success, he took advantage of a further opportunity for service, when he became a director of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, then known as the Hachnosas Orchim and destined in later years to exercise a powerful influence in the life of world Jewry. In 1890, he was chosen treasurer

of that Society, in the work of which, as a one-time immigrant boy himself, he has always taken the keenest interest. In recognition of his continuous efforts in behalf of this Society, he has for thirty-six years been annually re-elected as treasurer, still holding the office up to the present day.

In 1889, Mr. Fischel became a director of the Yeshiva Etz Chaim, whose building at number One Canal Street had been condemned by the city for the use of Seward Park. Once more Mr. Fischel's experience and ability were employed to advantage. To him was delegated the task of securing a building in place of the one the Yeshiva was compelled to vacate.

Mr. Fischel succeeded in locating new quarters at 85 Henry Street and purchased the building, giving as the initial payment thereon his own check for five hundred dollars, an act that filled his heart with joy for it was the first considerable contribution to charity that he had been enabled to make.

The purchase of this property was followed by Mr. Fischel's appointment as chairman of the Building Committee, a place that once again was more than an honorary one for he took upon his own shoulders the work of reconstructing the house for the needs of the Yeshiva. Shortly thereafter he was elected Vice President.

There were in these early days of Mr. Fischel's first religious and charitable activities, few great names in Jewish philanthropy. When unemployment, sickness or death were encountered, these immigrant Jews were frequently hard put to make ends meet, but at such times the pledge and promise of the Jew, ever to take care of his own, and the large part that charity plays in the Jewish religion, were brought to the fore and from their meager means one helped the other as best he could.

There was little or nothing of organized Jewish charity as it is known today, great institutions for the care of the orphaned, the aged and the sick and campaigns for the raising of vast sums for the support of these institutions. The charity of those days was private charity, help extended by the poor to those poorer than themselves, the making of neighborhood collections to save

the destitute from eviction, to put food into the mouths of the famished, to bring medical aid to the sick, to bury the dead. Great individual contributions to charity, made possible in later years by the amassing of huge fortunes, were then unknown.

## CHAPTER VII

### FIRST RELIGIOUS CLASSES FOR YOUNG GIRLS— FOUNDING OF THE HEBREW FREE LOAN

It was not long after the purchase of the building for the Yeshiva Etz Chaim and, despite his preoccupation in this work, that Mr. Fischel introduced an innovation in the religious training of the young that was attended by far reaching consequences.

Up to this time, all of the large Jewish institutions provided classes in religious instruction for boys and young men and there were many Talmud Torahs on the Lower East Side for this purpose but none had thought it desirable or necessary to provide similar instruction for girls. Mr. Fischel held that this was both illogical and wrong and that the future mothers of Jewish youth should be accorded the same opportunity for absorbing the teachings of Judaism as their brothers. He had long privately held this opinion, inspired as he had been by the religious training given to him by his own mother, but it was not until 1892 when he became a director of the Machzikay Talmud Torah at 225-227 East Broadway, the oldest Talmud Torah in the city, that he had the opportunity of putting his thoughts into action.

Shortly after becoming interested in this institution, of which in 1894 he became vice president, he proposed to the late Moses Butkowsky and several other of the directors that the Talmud Torah open a school for girls to be under the direction of a young woman teacher who had lately come to this country from Palestine.

The idea was at first bitterly opposed. No one had previously conceived of religious classes except for boys. In spite of the opposition to his plan, Mr. Fischel finally prevailed upon the directors to permit him to make the experiment, with the result that within a year, the applications from parents for admission

of their daughters ranging in age from ten to twelve years, far exceeded the school's accommodations.

This was the first time in the history of American Jewish institutions that a religious school for girls had been organized, although later every Jewish institution was to adopt the principle and furnish such instruction to both sexes. In order to make his experiment possible, Mr. Fischel personally engaged and personally paid the teacher.

At about this time one of the most important Jewish institutions of the present day was organized, one that has since its inception, enabled hundreds of thousands of men and women to overcome misfortune and to become independent, self-respectful and useful citizens. This institution, founded upon one of the basic tenets of the Jewish religion, is the Gemiluth Chasodim (Hebrew Free Loan Society). This Society now more than one-third of a century old, the president of which for many years has been Julius J. Dukas, was started with a capital of about \$200, contributed by poor men, who sought by making loans without interest to others poorer than themselves, to enable these needy to overcome temporary misfortune and to be placed in a position to earn a livelihood.

These loans frequently afforded the beneficiaries the opportunity of establishing themselves in a business, which in those days required only a few dollars. Since that time the Society has loaned many millions of dollars without impairment of its original capital which has been increased by donations and bequests on the part of such men as the late Jacob H. Schiff, The Baron and Baroness DeHirsch, Adolph Lewisohn and many other leading figures in Jewish philanthropy.

The New York Hebrew Free Loan Society has, furthermore, been the pattern for many other similar institutions established throughout the United States and all over the world. These have extended the most useful and practical form of assistance, namely, helping others to help themselves. The Society has further proved that most men, even when poor, are honest, and

will, if afforded the opportunity, repay their obligations. The formation of the Hebrew Free Loan Society was, of course, the outgrowth of the constantly multiplying needs of the Jewish community of New York, and Mr. Fischel was one of the first men to become interested in it and to assist in its development.

In 1897 he turned over the basement of his home, at this time located at 215 East Broadway, to this institution which occupied it rent free for several years. Mr. Fischel had the privilege of being one of the first directors of the Free Loan Society and its vice president. He has always maintained his interest and pride in the fine work accomplished by this society, of which he is still a director.

The dominant trait of Mr. Fischel's character, his religious fervor, which had merely become intensified by his early hardships and experiences and even more by the prosperity which followed, was now again expressed in a unique way. The ritual and the external attributes employed in the Orthodox observance of his faith, had exercised a potent influence on Mr. Fischel from the days of his boyhood. These things had appealed deeply to his imagination and to his love of the beautiful. He had for a number of years wished to make more sacred and impressive the religious observances in his own home and it was with this thought in mind that he purchased at this time, a small private house at 14 Jefferson Street. Here he was enabled to carry out a long cherished desire to have his own succah (tabernacle). This was one of the first private succahs of an elaborate character in New York and soon became a center of interest for the Jews of the entire neighborhood in which his home was situated. In this house, the family occupied the parlor floor and basement, as was then the fashion for those who had attained some means.

The Fischels remained in this house but two years, however, as his wife gave birth to two sons, whom the Almighty saw fit to take away in their infancy. As a result of these bereavements and in accordance with Talmudic injunction, they decided to change their abode in order to change their fortunes.

They then moved to a house at 235 Madison Street, where Mr. Fischel built a new succah, still finer than the one in his previous home. Here again the Fischel family was to be visited by sorrow, for two more sons were born whom the Lord, in His Wisdom, again saw fit to take from this life.

In 1896, four years after taking up their home in the Madison Street house, they moved to 215 East Broadway where they occupied the parlor and first floor, the basement being given over to the Free Loan Society. Here Mr. Fischel erected a more beautiful succah than he had enjoyed hitherto, and here, in 1897, the Fischels celebrated the tenth anniversary of their wedding, the occasion being observed as a formal housewarming as well. The family remained in this house until 1903 when they moved their residence uptown to 118 East 93rd Street.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EARLY CONNECTION WITH THE BETH ISRAEL HOSPITAL

It was in 1889 that Mr. Fischel's attention was strongly directed to the need for an adequate Jewish Hospital on the lower East Side. He then decided to devote as much of his time as possible to the work of the Beth Israel Hospital which had only just been organized. By this time, his ability, sincerity and generosity in connection with communal endeavors were beginning to become widely known and in 1891 he was invited to serve as a director of the Hospital. Nine years later, in 1900, he became Vice-President, and still occupies that post, having the distinction of being in point of service, the oldest member of the Board of Directors.

During the ten years that ensued from 1889 to 1899, Mr. Fischel devoted himself largely to the needs of the hospital, although at the same time he was active in a number of other religious and philanthropic movements.

The hospital's first home of its own was at 206 East Broadway, in a very dilapidated building and one entirely inadequate to the many demands made upon it by the population of this greatly congested neighborhood. Due to the high quality of its service, however, and the efficiency of its medical staff, the hospital attracted to its Board many prosperous merchants of the neighborhood who were eager to see it progress to the point where it might fill its obligations to the community.

At the meetings of the directors, Mr. Fischel continually urged that a new building be erected, but he failed to convince his associates that they were in a position to embark upon the project, as the hospital faced a considerable yearly deficit, there was

practically no money in the treasury and it was only with difficulty the current expenses could be met.

He had continuously in his mind, nevertheless, a picture of Beth Israel occupying a building fully adapted to its requirements. One day he noticed a piece of property at Jefferson and Cherry Streets which was advertised for sale at auction. Thoroughly familiar with East Side real estate values Mr. Fischel conceived this to be an unusual opportunity to purchase a site for Beth Israel at a low figure and went at once to the residence of the late Harris Cohen, of Blessed Memory, at that time president of the institution and who resided at 236 Madison Street. Mr. Fischel proposed that a committee be named to attend the auction sale and to buy the property if it could be purchased at a reasonable figure.

The idea struck Mr. Cohen as preposterous in view of the institution's financial condition at that time and he declared Mr. Fischel must be a dreamer to think of such an undertaking under the circumstances. This opposition did not, however, serve to lessen Mr. Fischel's enthusiasm or his belief that the plan was feasible. He proceeded to visit a number of the other directors with the final result that a special meeting was called to consider the proposal.

In extenuation of Mr. Cohen's attitude, it must be remembered that the communal activities of those days were conducted in a very different way from the manner in which they are carried out at the present time. Most men of that day, even those who were in comfortable circumstances, had but lately risen from conditions of poverty and were not so ready as is now the case to contribute of their cash or to lend their names to enterprises requiring large sums.

When, therefore, Mr. Fischel arose at a meeting of the Directors and expressed himself as willing to lend the institution one thousand dollars with which to bid in the property, provided four others were willing to do likewise, his suggestion was considered revolutionary.

It was, in fact, an unheard of idea at the time, but from this thought, implanted in the minds of the few men present at this meeting, it may be said the entire course of financing charitable undertakings was changed and the way was opened for philanthropic enterprises of far greater scope and magnitude than had ever before been attempted.

Upon the system of pledging financial support to the accomplishment of a philanthropic project as yet in its embryonic state and without financial resources, may be given the credit for the building in later years of virtually every large charitable and educational institution irrespective of the creed sponsoring it.

This same principle applied to giving, has, indeed, formed the basis for the conduct of every great philanthropic drive in the years which have followed and has resulted in the raising of countless millions of dollars that never could or would have been raised had any other method been followed. By the plan of first enlisting a man's interest in a cause and then securing his pledge to give to that cause from his income or according to his future ability to do so, the foundation was laid for the raising of funds that it would be utterly impossible to raise were an individual compelled to give only from his cash reserve of the moment.

Furthermore, by this plan it has been made possible to enlist a much broader and wider interest in such undertakings and to secure the aid and cooperation not only of individuals of wealth but of those of smaller means who have the desire and will to contribute but who have not always at their command the sum they are qualified and prepared to give over an extended period and under conditions made convenient for them.

Mr. Fischel furthermore suggested at the meeting where his revolutionary proposal was put forth that, if after two months, it was found impossible to raise the balance needed to take title to the property, the contract be sold and the profit applied to the institution. Should, however, the necessary sum be raised, the five-thousand dollars represented by his loan and that of the four others, should remain in the treasury as a permanent donation.

After a great deal of discussion, the late Nathan Hutkoff declared himself ready to follow Mr. Fischel's example. Next was Mr. Louis L. Richman and then the president, Mr. Cohen, who had at first been against any such plan, also agreed to lend one thousand dollars to the institution. The late Supreme Court Justice David Leventritt, who at the time was the attorney for Mr. Hutkoff, then drew up an agreement setting forth the terms Mr. Fischel had proposed and a committee of five was named to attend the auction and to bid on the property.

When the day of the auction arrived, it was learned that the property was to be sold in five separate parcels, and Mr. Fischel suggested that, in order that the auctioneer might not become aware of this philanthropic conspiracy, each of the five members of the purchasing committee, including himself, bid on a separate parcel. So well were his plans laid and so carefully was the program staged that the property was purchased for a total of \$46,000 regarded by experts as about one-third of its true value.

Mr. Fischel was then named as the chairman of the Building Committee to prepare plans for a new Beth Israel Hospital and for the next few months devoted himself assiduously to the task, marking as it did, the first large constructive work he had been privileged to carry into execution. The entire Jewish population of the lower East Side joined in the rejoicing that followed announcement of the plans for the new hospital, with the result that in December, 1899, the Jewish Herald, at that time a very influential newspaper, printed the following editorial, accompanied by the architect's drawing of the proposed structure and which article gave voice to the general rejoicing:

"The persecutions of the Jews in Russia have brought to our shores many men who have made their mark in the community, and who have contributed their talents to the development of Greater New York. Conspicuous among this number is Harry Fischel. Mr. Fischel is a director of the Beth Israel Hospital, and one great desire that always seemed to possess him was to build a new hospital. How was this to be brought about. The

hospital was in a bad way—could not pay its rent, was very much in debt, and seemed to be in the very throes of despair. At one of their meetings, when the directors were cudgelling their brains how to meet current expenses, Mr. Fischel entered and went to work at once on the business of the evening. He told them that there was to be a partition sale of five lots, corner Jefferson and Cherry Streets at the Real Estate Exchange on the following Wednesday, and if they did not buy these lots they would lose the opportunity of their lives. He offered to loan the hospital \$1000, if \$5000 could be raised by the directors. Messrs. Nathan Hutkoff, Louis L. Richman and Harris Cohen, each volunteered to loan the hospital \$1000. They borrowed another \$1000 and with this money they went to the Real Estate Exchange. They there conferred with prospective bidders and told them not to bid as they intended these five lots for hospital purposes. They purchased these lots for \$46,000 and twenty-four hours afterwards were offered \$10,000 profit by one of the prospective bidders, since which time Mr. Fischel has been untiring in his energies to raise money in order to build on this ground. He has been very successful. The money was raised, sufficient to start with, and the Beth Israel Hospital will soon put up a handsome structure which is sorely needed on the East Side, and which happy event was brought about through the efforts and energy of one man—Mr. Fischel.”

In the early part of 1900, arrangements were made for laying the cornerstone of the new Hospital, that was to be in every way a modern and sanitary building, thoroughly equipped to care for the needs of the poor people who flocked to the institution for treatment. The cornerstone was finally laid by Mr. Fischel on Sunday, April 1, an event in celebration of which the entire population of the lower East Side joined.



MR. FISCHEL AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-FIVE.



## CHAPTER IX

### A VISIT TO HIS MOTHER

THE enduring affection Mr. Fischel held for his parents through all the years which had elapsed since his departure from Meretz and although separated from them by many leagues of land and water, forms an insight into the very human qualities he possesses.

At no time in all these years and no matter how scanty his resources, had he ever failed to send to his aged mother and father every penny that he could afford until not only were their wants fully supplied but until his father was moved to write him that the care of so much money as his son sent him was becoming a burden and asked him to desist in his beneficence. Nor did Mr. Fischel confine his monetary help to his own relatives. He gave with equal liberality to his wife's family.

The mere knowledge that his parents were no longer in want, were, indeed, in possession of every luxury that money could provide in their primitive home, did not serve to appease the son's longing once more to clasp them in his arms. This desire became overwhelming and caused him to decide to return to the place of his birth while his father and mother were yet alive and which he feared, because of their advanced age, could not be for long.

His expectations were, however, never to be wholly realized for the reason that on April 10, 1897, Adar the second, in the leap year 5657, he received a cable message that his father had passed away. This, of course, only intensified his eagerness to see his mother and caused him at once to make plans for the journey abroad, plans which did not materialize until three years later, due to a variety of causes.

It was on May 1, 1900, that, with his wife and the four little

daughters with whom they had been blessed, Mr. Fischel finally embarked on the liner *Deutschland*, bound for Hamburg, occupying a first class cabin. What a contrast was here presented to his earlier voyage, when he had been confined in quarters worse than the steerage of this later day, and had lain with hundreds of others in a large compartment with hammocks three deep, one above the other and without ventilation of any kind.

As he entered the spacious and magnificent dining saloon, its tables loaded with delicacies, he could not but think what his fare had consisted of on that first ocean voyage, when in cramped quarters he subsisted on dry bread, a bit of herring and tea. Before boarding the *Deutschland*, Mr. Fischel had arranged with the chief steward to secure new dishes and cooking utensils in order that the food for his family, the preparation of which he himself supervised, might be cooked and served strictly in accordance with the dietary laws. It was probably the first time any passenger traveling in this class had made such arrangements.

On arriving at Hamburg, the Fischels proceeded at once to Koenigsburg, only a day's journey removed from Meretz. What joy and happiness here filled his heart at the prospect of so soon feeling his mother's embraces after an absence of nearly fifteen years! With what pride and satisfaction would he not introduce his wife and four little ones! He could scarcely wait for the hours to pass before the reunion should occur.

At Yatkunin, the Russian frontier, however, his eyes gazed upon a sight that filled him with dread, lest, in some manner, this reunion should never take place. This spectacle was the view of a Russian soldier pacing forbiddingly up and down, a bayonet over his shoulder. Although Mr. Fischel carried his American citizen's passport he could not but fear that he might be seized by the authorities and forced into the military service, without ever having the opportunity of again meeting his mother, a contemplation which caused him to grow cold with apprehension and terror.

But his good wife at his side, then, as on other occasions in his life, solved the difficulty by suggesting that he remain in Germany and that she would cross the border and bring his mother to him. Despite his mother's age, she was now almost 80, he could see no other way out of the dilemma and consented to the plan.

It was decided that the reunion of mother and son should take place at Insterburg, the nearest town on the frontier to Meretz, and here the aged woman and her daughter-in-law repaired.

It would be impossible to convey adequately the picture of this meeting between Mr. Fischel and his venerable parent, to whom he was now, with the death of her husband, the chief solace and comfort. Leaning heavily upon her daughter-in-law's arm she entered the hotel room where her son awaited her. With her age-dimmed eyes, however, she did not at once see him, but sensing his presence, exclaimed at the top of her voice: "Ahrzik!"—the term of endearment by which she had always addressed him, "Where are you? Come to my arms that I may kiss you."

They held each other in a close embrace for many moments after which she said:

"Since the Almighty has given me the blessing of again holding you in my arms, I am now ready to die and join your father in the better world."

After a short lapse in which both were too overcome with emotion to talk, she then uttered, in the words of Jacob, this sentence:

"To see you again I never expected, and now the Almighty has given me the privilege not alone to see you, but also to see your children."

Together with his mother, Mrs. Fischel also brought to this frontier town Mr. Fischel's two sisters and their children. Three days in all were spent in this family reunion, during which Mr. Fischel recounted to his mother and sisters all his experiences in America, a story that was, of course, of absorbing interest to them. He then heard, in turn, an account of what, during the years, had befallen them, heard the details concerning his father's death and was the confidant of his sisters who related their

troubles to him, troubles for which, happily however, he had the solution.

For, after listening to these difficulties, he purchased a supply of pocketbooks, changed a large sum of American money into twenty rouble gold pieces and filled each pocketbook in accordance with the needs of the recipient. So swiftly did the time fly that before anyone realized it, the hour for a new separation had arrived.

Instantly all the joy and gladness of the hour was changed to sadness and the thought that he would, in all probability, never see his mother again caused Mr. Fischel the deepest anguish. With tears filling his eyes, he escorted his mother and sisters to the train and kissing them fondly, bid them all farewell. It was Mr. Fischel's final leave taking of his mother, for despite all the care that was lavished upon her and the ample means at her command, she lived but two years longer. On January 29, 1902 (the 21st day of Schvat, in the year 5662) this noble woman, the mother of six children, three sons and three daughters, passed away at the ripe age of eighty-two. Not Mr. Fischel alone, but all who were acquainted with her many sacrifices, devout life and kindly deeds, are certain that she joined her husband in Heaven. May both their souls rest in peace!

While Mrs. Fischel remained with her children for four weeks at the home of her youth, Mr. Fischel awaited her in Berlin where most of all he was impressed with the mode of living practiced by the Germans in contrast to the bustle and hustle of America. Here, he saw everyone apparently taking life easy and yet enjoying prosperity and happiness, there was no rush, no nervous strain, no excitement. Business men took two hours in the middle of the day, from twelve to two, for lunch, called Mittag Stunde, and everyone seemed to have the leisure to seek and find enjoyment. His thoughts then strayed to New York, where very few took the time for a lunch hour, where everyone raced at top speed from early morning till late at night, wearing them-

selves out and seemingly accomplishing no more by such strenuous living than these slow-moving, contented Germans.

When he was rejoined by his wife, the couple went to Paris, where they remained two weeks, during which time they had the opportunity to visit the great world's exposition of that year and finally at Hamburg, boarded the then Leviathan of the seas, the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosser, for the journey back to the United States, the beloved country of their adoption.

With these chapters is concluded that part of Mr. Fischel's life which he has recounted from memory and which comprises the first fifteen years of his career in America. The rest of this biography will be compiled largely from records Mr. Fischel has preserved regarding his activities in many fields of endeavor. These consist of speeches and reports he has made on numerous occasions and which are a part of the history of the principal Jewish movements initiated during his life. Many of the facts also are taken from thousands of items in the press, both news articles and editorial comment upon the activities with which Mr. Fischel has been identified and his participation in them.

## CHAPTER X

### FIRST MEETING WITH JACOB H. SCHIFF

THE late Jacob H. Schiff, of Blessed Memory, was the outstanding leader of his people at this period as, indeed, he was up to the time of his death. Mr. Schiff's advice and aid were sought in every matter affecting the welfare and needs of the city's Jewish population. He had achieved wide fame as a philanthropist and, of course, was recognized as among the leading financiers of the world. Not only were his personal benefactions large and numerous, establishing what was then unquestionably the record for individual giving but he was actively interested in a great number of institutions.

Mr. Schiff was to a large degree Mr. Fischel's ideal of a public benefactor, so that his first meeting with the great man, who was later to be his friend and supporter in many controversies connected with the conduct of the city's Jewish institutions, stands out among the most important of his recollections.

Mr. Fischel returned from Europe with his family toward the end of September, just prior to the High Holidays, his mind filled with plans as to how he should employ his future time. He had been greatly impressed as has been noted, with what he had seen while abroad, particularly the quiet life in Germany, and he determined to alter his own mode of living to conform somewhat with what he believed to be the saner methods of the German people.

This he could not very well do, however, if he was also to return to his business undertakings with his former energy, and at the same time comply with all the demands made upon his time by the large number of religious and philanthropic causes with which he was by now connected. Accordingly, he de-

cided that, for a year, he would take a rest from business and devote his entire time to communal work.

His reputation in philanthropy grew rapidly and his services came to be in great demand on all sides. Before long he was invited to serve on the Board of Directors of most of the important religious, educational and philanthropic institutions in New York and soon earned the name of being the leading figure among Orthodox Jews in these fields of public endeavor.

This prominence enabled him to be of much greater usefulness than in former years, for it widened the circle of his acquaintances and largely increased his influence, so that, in the course of time, his advice on many matters affecting Orthodox Jewry came to be sought by those who represented other factions of Jewish religious thought.

Thus it was that his first meeting with Mr. Schiff was brought about. This occurred in the year 1901 at the annual meeting of the Hebrew Free Loan Society, when Mr. Fischel was invited to address the directors on the subject of "Philanthropy and Religion—The Basic Principles of Life."

At the close of his remarks, Mr. Schiff walked over to Mr. Fischel, then about thirty-five years of age, and warmly congratulated him on the views he had expressed in his address at the same time extending to him the invitation to become a member of the Advisory Board of the Montefiore Home, of which Mr. Schiff was then President. Thus began the friendship between the two men which lasted until Mr. Schiff's death. Mr. Fischel, of course, gladly accepted the invitation to become associated with the Montefiore Home, representing as it did a new phase of philanthropic work with which he had not previously been identified.

Shortly after this meeting, Mr. Schiff visited Japan and was decorated by the Japanese Government for the financial assistance his banking firm, Kuhn, Loeb and Company, had extended to that country. On his return to the United States, the directors of the Montefiore Home arranged a large reception for

Mr. Schiff at Sherry's, at which Mr. Fischel, as a member of the Advisory Board of the Home, was present.

After the formal reception, the guests were ushered into a private dining room where a buffet lunch was to be served. What was Mr. Fischel's consternation when he observed that one of the courses on the menu was lobster.

So great was Mr. Fischel's indignation and resentment at the thought that this biblically forbidden article of food was to be served to Jews at a function of this character that, despite his being the newest member of the Advisory Board of the Home, he at once addressed himself to the Chairman, who was a Supreme Court Justice, and voiced his feelings in the following words:

"Judge, if you will not consider me in contempt of court, I wish to express my indignation at the arrangements of your committee."

Mr. Schiff, who was standing close by and overheard this remark, exclaimed: "Go ahead, Mr. Fischel, and say what is in your mind. If the Judge has you arrested, I will furnish bail."

Mr. Fischel then again turned to the Judge and said:

"We have assembled here to honor Mr. Schiff as the president of Montefiore Home. I have had the great privilege of reading the life of Sir Montefiore, for whom this institution was named and in his biography it is shown that he lived a strictly Orthodox Jewish life. I am, therefore, of the opinion that, if the late Sir Montefiore had been asked to lend the use of his name to an institution serving lobsters for luncheon, he would unquestionably have refused his consent."

Before the Judge had even the opportunity to reply to Mr. Fischel's protest, Mr. Schiff at once broke into the conversation saying:

"Mr. Fischel is right. I am positive Sir Montefiore would not have allowed the use of his name for our institution had he thought that it was to be desecrated by such an act."

The Judge then apologized profusely, ordered the lobster

course removed and promised that, should he again be the chairman of such an affair, the offense would not be repeated.

Mr. Fischel felt that by this victory he had accomplished a great deal in making clear to those Jewish leaders of the community, who were not Orthodox, the necessity of observing the laws of the Jewish faith, especially in the institutions they conducted. From that time on, he never failed, whenever the opportunity presented itself, to stand up and fight for his convictions and for the enforcement of every provision of Jewish religious injunction.

## CHAPTER XI

### BUILDS FIRST MODERN JEWISH THEATER

THE great influx of Jewish immigration of the early nineties brought forth many new problems for solution.

Having so lately arrived from their native lands, chiefly Russia and Poland, many of the new settlers could speak little if any English and there was a real need for supplying the rapidly increasing Jewish population with the opportunity for mental relaxation and diversion of the type to which the people were accustomed and which they could understand.

Such places of amusement as then existed on the Lower East Side for the Hebrew and Yiddish speaking population, were antiquated structures that had long out-grown their usefulness and many of which were regarded as fire traps.

They were totally inadequate to the needs of the public which they were called upon to serve and failed to give the opportunity for full expression of that literary, artistic and dramatic genius the Jew has always possessed.

It was about this time, in 1902, that Mr. Fischel was approached by that great actor of the Yiddish stage, the late Jacob P. Adler, who suggested to him a project which was neither strictly business nor strictly philanthropic, but one in which both elements were in a degree combined.

Mr. Adler asked Mr. Fischel to build a new theater which should be entirely devoted to plays acted in Yiddish. This, as Mr. Adler pointed out, was a pressing necessity of the moment.

Although Mr. Fischel believed that business and philanthropy can rarely be successfully joined, the idea appealed to him and he accordingly purchased the old Lord and Taylor property at



NEW YORK'S FIRST MODERN YIDDISH THEATRE.  
*Erected by Mr. Fischel in 1904 at the suggestion of the great Jewish actor, the late Jacob P. Adler, at Grand and Chrystie Streets.*



Grand and Chrystie Streets, on which site he constructed the Grand Theatre, the first modern Yiddish theatre in New York.

The building, which was strictly fireproof, contained every known improvement in playhouse construction up to that time, and when it was formally opened on February 4, 1904, was regarded as one of the finest theatres in the city. The opening exercises were attended by the then Mayor of New York, the Hon. Seth Low and many other public officials of both city and state. These officials highly commended Mr. Fischel for the time, energy and money he had put into this project, which really meant the safeguarding of human lives.

So heavy was the Jewish immigration in the year 1903 that the Lower East Side, previously congested to the point of saturation, became seriously overcrowded. Many of the people who had come to America in earlier years and who had prospered, consequently began to move their residences to the section of the city known as Yorkville and to the lower West Side. Mr. Fischel decided to move with the tide.

He accordingly purchased a plot of land at 118 East 93rd Street, where he erected a handsome and commodious private residence, having in mind the provision of rooms where the directors of the many institutions with which he was affiliated might meet, and also where his four daughters, rapidly growing into young womanhood, might have a place to entertain. In this home Mr. Fischel, true to his ideals, also built a very beautiful tabernacle, by far the finest he had had in any of his homes. Most of the furnishings for the new residence were purchased at the St. Louis World's Fair which he and Mrs. Fischel attended in the summer of 1904.

Although the Ninety-third Street house was occupied by the Fischels in 1905, the housewarming was not held until March 10, 1907.

This celebration was attended by the most prominent leaders in New York Jewry of that day, including the directors of nearly every Jewish institution in the city.

It had been Mr. Fischel's custom while he lived downtown to be easily accessible to all who might wish to see him and he there had maintained an office in his parlor where hundreds who required assistance of one kind or another, who desired financial aid or who wished to obtain admission to a hospital, orphan asylum, home for the aged or other institution, were in the habit of visiting him. Much of Mr. Fischel's time was occupied with these matters and he would either give these poor people a letter of introduction to the proper institution or would personally visit in their behalf the various philanthropies to which he contributed.

When Mr. Fischel moved to Yorkville, he was not long in discovering that it was exceedingly difficult for these needy ones to see him. For a year after moving uptown, Mr. Fischel arranged office hours in the evenings in which these people might visit him and made it a practice to defray their carfare. Even this arrangement, however, proved unsatisfactory because it was inconvenient to Mr. Fischel's visitors and also served to disturb his hours with his family. Accordingly he leased an office in the World Building on Park Row where he spent every afternoon and where he was able to renew close contact with the unfortunate ones.

In 1904, Mr. Fischel was honored by the President of the Borough of Manhattan, Jacob A. Cantor, with an appointment as a member of the Local School Board of the Board of Education. At the first meeting of the Board which he attended he was elected secretary.

It so happened that at this time the Superintendent of Schools had plans in view to raise the height of new school buildings from five to six stories and to install elevators in them. The architect of the Board of Education, knowing of Mr. Fischel's practical knowledge of architecture and building construction requested him to give his opinion regarding the experiment, and Mr. Fischel at once and unhesitatingly expressed his entire disapproval of the proposal on the ground that a six story building, especially with

elevators, constituted a menace to the safety of the children who, at opening and closing time, might easily be injured in rushing to and from their classes.

Despite Mr. Fischel's objections, however, Public School 62, occupying the block on Hester Street, from Essex to Norfolk Streets, was constructed with elevators and, as a matter of record, proved a failure from a practical viewpoint, from the day it was opened.

## CHAPTER XII

### ERECTING A SYNAGOGUE IN THE CATSKILLS

IN the years following the first considerable influx of Jews from Europe to the United States many had achieved prosperity by dint of hard work, ability and sacrifice and as a result of the opportunities afforded them in the new land.

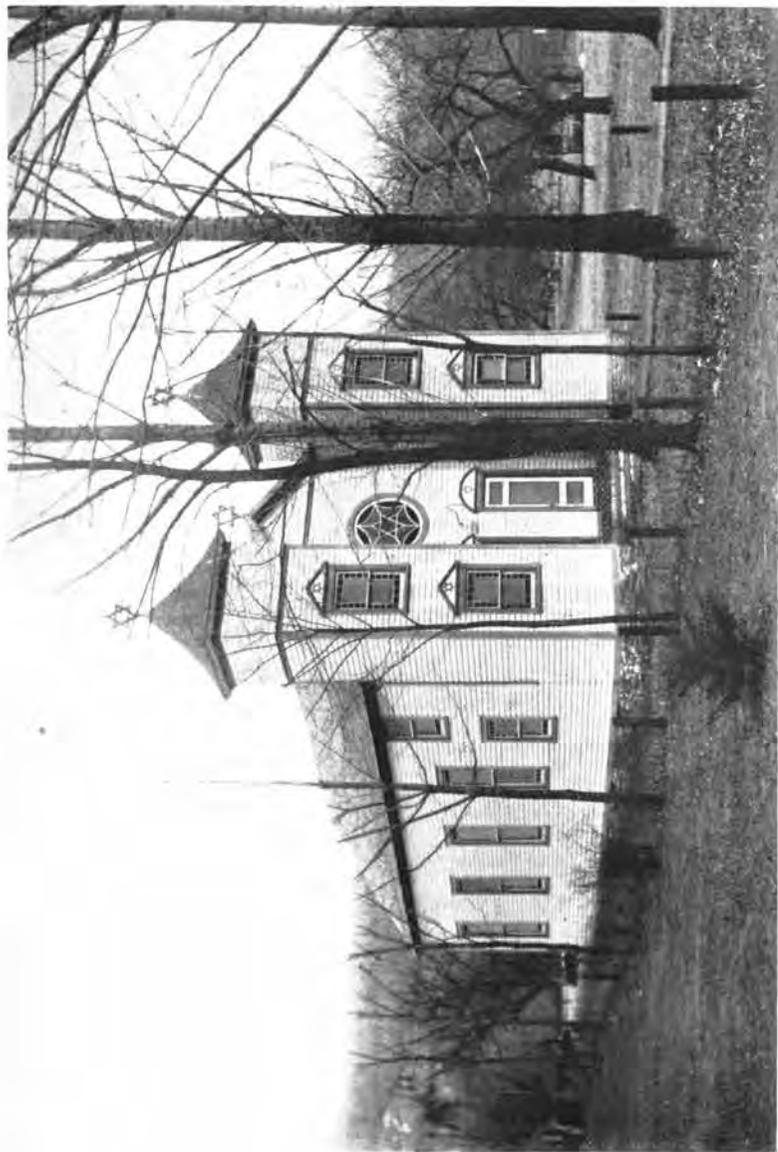
These, like Mr. Fischel, employed their good fortune to give their families comforts and advantages that had been denied to them in their youth and so it was that many had provided themselves with summer homes to which they repaired with their families for their vacations.

One of the most favored of the localities for summer Jewish colonies was the Catskill Mountains and shortly after moving to Yorkville, Mr. Fischel purchased a plot of ground at Hunter, Greene County, New York, where he proceeded to build a summer residence which he first occupied in 1904.

In the summer of 1905, Mr. Fischel was approached by a large number of the Jewish residents of Hunter who told him of the difficulty they experienced in finding a place in which to hold Sabbath services.

Mr. Fischel at once decided to remedy the situation and, with the late Morris Levinsky, approached each one of the Jewish people in the town asking them to contribute to the building of a synagogue.

The effort was unavailing, as sufficient interest could not be aroused nor could funds be obtained. This did not deter Mr. Fischel. He decided that a synagogue was necessary for the town's welfare, and determined to build it himself. Through the generosity of Dr. Samuel Friedman, who owned a large plot of



SYNAGOGUE ERECTED IN 1906 AT HUNTER, N. Y.  
*The first orthodox Jewish House of Worship in the Catskill Mountains, erected by Mr. Fischel and still maintained by him.*



ground in the center of the village, a site was secured, together with considerable lumber which Dr. Friedman also contributed.

One Saturday night in the beginning of August, Mr. Fischel commenced work on the plans for the synagogue and before the summer ended, a beautiful structure accommodating 250 persons, was completed. Mr. Fischel donated the necessary scrolls of the law, Talmudic and other books, pews and such further equipment as was needed for the services and he has since maintained the synagogue at his own expense during every summer from 1904 to the present day, thus affording thousands of Jewish people the opportunity of worshipping while on their vacations, amid suitable surroundings.

In its issue of June 22, 1906, the Hebrew Standard took formal notice of this opportunity for religious service afforded to the summer residents of the Catskills, by printing on its first page a picture of the synagogue at Hunter, with the following comment.

"The evergrowing number of Jewish residents in Greene County, Catskill Mountains, has made a permanent place of worship an absolute necessity. It took the effort of Mr. Harry Fischel assisted by Dr. Samuel Friedman, to supply this need. Mr. Fischel has erected a synagogue on a site furnished by Dr. Friedman. The sacred edifice, is not only used for divine worship, but has Hebrew and religious classes therein as well. An official teacher has been engaged by Mr. Fischel for this purpose. Regular money offering is not permitted at the Sabbath services. The expense incurred in engaging of the Chozan, Shochet, Teacher and Sexton are defrayed by the summer residents, and at the close of the season, the deficit and all other expenses in connection with the synagogue are borne by Mr. Fischel personally."

## CHAPTER XIII

### FORMATION OF AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

IMMEDIATELY after the frightful pogroms in Kishinev, Russia, in the year 1905, steps were taken by the leading Jews of the United States to collect a fund for the victims and to safeguard the right of the Jewish people throughout the world to worship God according to their faith. This movement resulted in the formation by seventy representative Jews (of whom Mr. Fischel had the honor to be chosen as one) of the American Jewish Committee. The first annual meeting took place at the Hotel Astor, New York City, on November 14, 1906, lasting from 10 A.M. until 6 P.M. with a luncheon dividing the sessions. The meeting was presided over by the late Judge Meyer Sulzberger, in that year President of the Committee.

When the hour for luncheon arrived, Mr. Fischel arose and asked the privilege of the floor and when it was accorded him, he said:

"Mr. President and Members of the Committee. We have assembled here for the purpose of discussing problems affecting all Jews. Many of the members of this Committee are members of some of the largest philanthropic institutions of America, which are proud to boast that they are conducted in a non-sectarian manner, which is as it should be.

"However, when it comes to serving luncheon to our own people this is a different matter and the luncheon served here is nothing but sectarian, whereas it should be strictly non-sectarian."

The Chairman here interrupted Mr. Fischel's remarks by saying:

"I believe I am thoroughly conversant with the English language and I have never heard the term non-sectarian as ap-

plied to a luncheon. Will you please explain what you mean by that?"

Mr. Fischel then replied:

"A non-sectarian luncheon means that the Orthodox Jew can eat it, the Conservative Jew will not spoil his stomach by it and even the Reform Jew will not die from it.

"Instead of such a repast you are serving here a strictly sectarian meal, of which only the Reform Jew can partake and you are depriving all those who believe in observance of the Jewish dietary laws from eating the food served, compelling them to go home and, in many cases, preventing them from returning, which I believe is most unjust."

Judge Sulzberger and the other members of the Committee expressed themselves as in accord with the views presented by Mr. Fischel with the result that he was asked to act as chairman of the luncheon for the following year, and to provide what, in his judgment, should be a meal of which every faction of Jewry might partake without injury to their religious sensibilities.

Mr. Fischel accepted the assignment and shortly before the time for the next annual meeting, arranged for the serving of a genuinely Kosher luncheon.

On the day of the meeting and just prior to the hour for luncheon, Judge Sulzberger, who again was chairman, announced:

"Gentlemen of the Committee—it gives me great pleasure to inform you that today we are to have a non-sectarian luncheon under the chairmanship of Mr. Harry Fischel."

As chairman of the luncheon, it was Mr. Fischel's privilege to have the late Jacob H. Schiff seated on his right and that other great philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, of Chicago on his left. Upon entering the dining room, Mr. Rosenwald expressed his pleasure and surprise at finding that a strictly Kosher luncheon could be prepared with such appetizing attractiveness. Before the meal was concluded, he gave further expression to his enjoyment and his thanks to Mr. Fischel, exclaiming that if the dietary

laws could be so well and beautifully observed, then he would like to have them followed in his own home.

The occasion proved to Mr. Fischel's satisfaction that where one insists upon that which he thinks is right, especially where the question is one of principle, he invariably wins respect even from those who differ with him.

In 1906, the Home for the Daughters of Jacob, now one of the largest institutions in the city, was organized in Mr. Fischel's home. Mrs. Fischel, was one of the organizers and first vice-president from the time of the Home's inception up to 1925. The institution soon found its first quarters at 40 Gouverneur Street entirely too small for its use and purchased the property at 301-302-303 East Broadway. Due to Mrs. Fischel's importunities, Mr. Fischel was prevailed upon to accept the appointment as chairman of the Building Committee and spent a great deal of time on this work. Mr. Fischel laid the cornerstone of this building on October 6, 1907.

Shortly after he had finished this undertaking for the Daughters of Jacob, the Hebrew Sheltering House amalgamated with the Hebrew Immigrant Society, forming the institution known as the Hebrew Sheltering Immigrant Aid Society of America, of which Mr. Fischel was the treasurer. This institution required a new building to be used as a home for immigrants and Mr. Fischel took advantage of his friendship with Mr. Schiff to appeal to him for assistance in financing the project.

Mr. Schiff, who was greatly interested throughout his life in immigration work, agreed to loan the Society the sum of \$35,000 in the form of a mortgage on property to be purchased at 229-231 East Broadway, comprising two old houses, which were to be reconstructed for the purpose in view. Mr. Schiff agreed, furthermore, that, should the work prove successful within a period of ten years, he would cancel the mortgage without any payment.

Mr. Fischel was again drafted as chairman of the Building Committee and successfully carried out the work of remodelling these two houses into an immigrant home. The building was com-

pleted in February 1907, and on March 15 of that year, the formal opening of the structure by the Hebrew Sheltering Immigrant Aid Society of America took place, the institution continuing to be housed there until it moved in later years to its new building at 425 Lafayette Street.

From the time of his completion of the Grand Theatre project in 1903 until 1911, Mr. Fischel did practically no work of a commercial character. Between these years there occurred the panic of 1907, which caused thousands of persons to lose their fortunes and which particularly affected those engaged in the real estate and building lines, as well as practically all financial institutions. Except for the fact that his income was temporarily depleted and that he was called upon to meet large demands upon his purse by reason of the general poverty which ensued, Mr. Fischel was in no way affected by this panic, as he was virtually out of business at the time, a stroke of good fortune for which he gave fervent thanks to the Almighty as it enabled him to continue, without curtailment, his work for and contributions to charitable causes.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MR. FISCHEL AND THE JEWISH ORPHAN PROBLEM

It was in February 1909 that Mr. Fischel's thoughts and efforts were directed into an entirely new channel, namely the problem of the Jewish child in this great city, particularly the orphans. In this connection the first step was the organization in his home, with Mrs. Fischel as one of the guiding spirits, of the Hebrew Day Nursery, whose function it was to care for the children of mothers who were compelled to go out to work by the day. Mrs. Fischel, who was elected treasurer of this institution, which office she still holds, requested her husband to look for a home for the nursery and he succeeded in buying the house at 262 Henry Street, for which as a deposit, he gave his own check of \$500. He then altered the building, which the institution still occupies. In addition to the original building, a branch was later added at 63 East 107th Street.

A still greater problem than that which the Day Nursery was designed to solve was that of the Jewish children in the orphan asylums, who in those days were left entirely without religious instruction or training. These children, who were to become a part of the future generation of Jewish men and women, were taught nothing about Judaism and its history, were ignorant of the meaning of the Sabbath, and of the Jewish dietary laws and were even without the knowledge of Jewish prayers. Aside from an occasional sermon, the meaning of which they little understood, no effort was made to care for anything but their physical well-being and of course their secular instruction.

This problem had for years been a sore point with many Orthodox Jews, who had striven ineffectually to convince the heads of the institutions, particularly the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society, that they were

derelict in their duty toward their wards in failing to give them religious instruction.

The brunt of the effort had fallen upon the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, of which Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, eminent Rabbi, was the president and who had used his wide acquaintance and considerable influence with the leaders of all shades of religion, in the effort to make them realize the seriousness of this omission in its effect on the future lives of these children. Despite the efforts of Dr. Mendes and many other Rabbis, however, no progress had been made.

The two institutions together cared for more than 1800 children. Many had gone from the institutions to take positions of importance in business and the professions with no conception of the sacredness of the religion to which they were by birth attached.

Mr. Fischel had many times given earnest consideration to this question and to its ultimate effect upon the Judaism of the future and had hoped for the opportunity to do something that might alter these conditions.

Thus it seemed almost like an answer to his prayers, when a real estate broker came to his office in October 1909, and offered for sale the property of an old infant asylum situated at 161st Street and Eagle Avenue.

Mr. Fischel at once went to look at the property, which consisted of about ten city lots, on which were several good buildings with accommodations for about 200 children. The minute he saw it, the thought occurred to him that here was the opportunity to start an orphan asylum to be conducted under strictly orthodox methods. With the germ of this idea firmly implanted in his mind, he returned to his office and at once called a conference of several of his friends at which he laid the plan before them.

The idea met with enthusiastic response and before the meeting adjourned, Mr. Fischel had raised pledges for a fund of \$3000 to make a deposit on the property, provided a suitable purchase price could be arranged. He then entered into negotiations with

the broker, finally agreeing to pay \$35,000 for the property, which was much less than its real value.

When he again called his friends together to collect the \$3,000 they had volunteered to contribute, he found, however, they had undergone a change of heart and all were agreed that the proposition was entirely too large to undertake, especially in view of the existing institutions, with millions of dollars behind them, and the opposition to the undertaking that might be expected to develop from this source.

Mr. Fischel did not permit this bogey to frighten him and when he found he could not expect to receive help from these men, he decided to conclude the purchase in his own name. As soon as he had closed the contract, Mr. Fischel took steps to obtain a charter for an orphan asylum as required by law, but, on consulting with counsel, found that, in order to secure such a charter, he would first have to secure the consent of the then Council of Communal Institutions, which consisted of the presidents of all the large charitable institutions of the City.

Judge Samuel Greenbaum was the president of this Council and Mr. Fischel turned to him to put his case and to obtain his approval. He was considerably surprised on being informed by Judge Greenbaum that he had no power to give such approval but that he would call a meeting of the Council members and that Mr. Fischel would be later advised of the decision reached.

Then followed a long and bitter struggle on Mr. Fischel's part to win consent for the undertaking or else to change conditions in the existing institutions, a struggle in which he was compelled to surmount great opposition on the part of the most influential men in the community.

Mr. Fischel waited in vain for several weeks after his visit to Judge Greenbaum for word of what had transpired and failing to hear anything, again went to the Judge with the demand that he receive an answer one way or the other. After waiting again some little time he was informed that the Council had met and had refused its approval of the proposed asylum on the ground

that it would interfere with the two large existing institutions for the care of orphans.

This discouragement only served to strengthen Mr. Fischel's determination to launch the new orphanage and he, accordingly, notified Judge Greenbaum that he intended retaining a lawyer and that he would demand a charter without the consent of the Council, if that body did not afford him a hearing in the presence of its full membership. After a number of pleadings before Judge Greenbaum, the latter promised that he would call such a meeting and do what was within his power to assist him.

Shortly thereafter, a hearing on the project was arranged for, in the office of Adolph Lewisohn at 42 Broadway. This meeting was attended by the heads of many institutions and, besides Mr. Lewisohn, those who were present included the late Jacob H. Schiff, president of Montefiore Hospital; Mr. George Blumenthal, president of Mt. Sinai Hospital; Judge Joseph Newberger, president of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum; Judge Greenbaum, president of the Educational Alliance and the late Edward Lauterbach, who was present as the attorney for the Council.

Mr. Fischel went fully into his plans, explaining how he had come to purchase the property and how he felt that an orphan asylum where Jewish children would be brought up under strictly Orthodox auspices would fill a long felt want in the community. But Mr. Fischel went further than this, he attacked the existing institutions as being not, in fact, Jewish, although they were represented as such.

After fully two hours of discussion the members of the Council at first flatly refused to entertain the idea, but before the meeting finally adjourned changed their minds to the extent of agreeing to another hearing on the matter the following week.

In order to more fully fortify himself with facts to overcome the opposition he now knew he could expect, he decided to take with him to this second meeting as spokesmen, other than himself, a Rabbi, a lawyer and a business man. The three men he chose to accompany him were Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, as the Rabbi; the

late Adolph Cohen, then a prominent member of the bar, a native American and strictly Orthodox in his principles and observance, as the lawyer, and the late Samuel I. Hyman, a very successful merchant who strictly adhered to Orthodox observances, as the business man. Mr. Hyman was also selected for the reason that he had been brought up in an orphan asylum.

Upon arriving at the meeting, Mr. Fischel learned that Jacob H. Schiff was to preside. He found the same men present, (with one or two additions,) who had attended the previous meeting. Mr. Fischel made the demand that a stenographer take down every word which should be uttered, his argument being that, should the Council again refuse to give its approval to the project, he desired the stenographic minutes of the meeting for the purpose of starting legal proceedings by which to compel the granting of a charter and also that he might preserve the record to leave to his children in after years, that he might show them how he had fought to perpetuate the ideals of Judaism in America. Mr. Schiff granted Mr. Fischel's request and a stenographer was called in.

Mr. Fischel asked the privilege of speaking last and first introduced Dr. Mendes who made a strong plea for preserving Judaism in America. He next called upon Mr. Cohen, who pleaded the case from its legal aspects, and finally asked Mr. Hyman to give his views. The latter declared that, had it not been for the religious training he had received in his youth in the orphan asylum, he would not have been able to face life as he had and that, had he been brought up in either of the two institutions represented in the Council, both he and the generations of Hymans to come after him would have been lost to Judaism entirely.

Despite the eloquence and strong logic of these pleas, Mr. Fischel saw the Council was not yet convinced of the necessity of the new asylum and that stronger arguments still would have to be used if the plan was not to suffer defeat.

Accordingly, he arose and using language that was probably the strongest which had ever been addressed in such circumstances to leaders of Jewry of this importance, he denounced them as be-

ing false to the trust imposed in them by the Jewish people and delinquent in the duty they owed to Judaism. He further declared that, if the institutions they directed were not to be conducted in a Jewish manner and in accordance with the teachings of the Jewish religion, the necessity for separate Jewish institutions was then made manifest. He also pointed out that the parents of these children entrusted to their care had no other hope than that their offspring might be brought up as good Jews and perpetuate the principles of their faith after they had gone.

Mr. Fischel was moved to an exhibition of intense feeling during this discourse, gaining courage from the righteousness of his cause, that of the preservation of his religion. At the conclusion of his remarks, Mr. Lauterbach arose and said:

"Mr. Fischel is perfectly right. I had the privilege of drawing the charter for our orphan asylum myself and it provides for a strictly religious institution, with religious instruction."

This intention of the organizers, Mr. Lauterbach added, had never been carried out.

This stand so bravely taken by the attorney for these institutions entirely changed the complexion of the meeting and Mr. Fischel at once noticed by the expression of those present that they began to see justice in the claims he had set forth.

He then made them the following proposition: "If they would agree to install (kashruth), observance of the Jewish dietary laws, in their two institutions and give the children a religious education, he would abandon his proposed institution and give them the profit he had been offered upon the property toward the expense of purchasing new cooking utensils and dishes."

Immediately after this offer, the committee adjourned to another room to confer alone and in a few minutes returned, much in the manner of a jury rendering its verdict, with Mr. Lauterbach as their foreman. Addressing himself to Mr. Fischel, Mr. Lauterbach, said:

"Mr. Fischel, we have discussed your proposition from every point of view and after due consideration have decided that, since

your action in this matter is for the interest and welfare of the Jewish children and since you have so clearly shown your sincerity and personal disinterestedness, we will grant your request.

"We agree to install kashruth and religious education in such a manner as will be satisfactory to a Rabbi of your selection. As to your kind offer to turn over to us the profit on the property you bought for this purpose of establishing an orphan asylum, we cannot accept this for the reason that we do not wish to be paid for performing our duty. We certainly appreciate the sacrifice you are willing to make in giving away such a large sum of money and we suggest, since you have decided not to profit in any way from this transaction, that you turn the property back to the original owner, the Hebrew Infant Asylum, and let them have the profit which they can use toward the construction of a new building."

Mr. Fischel accepted this suggestion and turned the property back to the president of the Hebrew Infant Asylum, Mr. Beno Newberger, together with his check for \$500 as a personal contribution to the building fund. The institution shortly thereafter disposed of the property for a much larger price than that at which it had been sold to Mr. Fischel.

The radical change in attitude toward observance of the dietary laws and toward religious training for the children in the institutions, embodied in the far reaching surrender by their directors, naturally filled Mr. Fischel's heart with joy. He was not satisfied merely to have the decision spread upon the minutes, however, but insisted that it be reduced to a formal agreement in writing, stating just how and when the change in the system of management of the institutions was to be effected.

Judge Newberger, president of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, suggested that, as the Passover Holidays were approaching, kashruth be installed in his institution at that time. Adolph Lewisoohn, speaking in behalf of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society, of which he was president, proposed that it be installed in the latter institution on the completion of the new cottages at

Pleasantville, New York, then under course of construction and which were expected to be occupied in about two months, pointing out that this would save the expense of installing new kitchens and providing new dishes in the building about to be vacated.

Mr. Fischel was satisfied to accept both suggestions and an agreement was accordingly drawn up and signed by Judge Newburger, for the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, and by Mr. Lewisohn for the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society. This agreement, still held by Mr. Fischel, is one of his most prized possessions. It is worthy of record here that the Hebrew Orphan Asylum has carried out the agreement to the letter. While the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society has lived up to the terms, insofar as religious instruction for its wards is concerned, the dietary laws have never been carried out in the same manner and spirit as has been true of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum.

Credit for the results obtained in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum is largely due to Dr. Solomon Lowenstein, then its superintendent and now the executive head of the Jewish Federation. Dr. Lowenstein, almost overnight, it may be said, changed the Asylum from an institution in which religion was practically unknown to a strictly Orthodox one.

In accomplishing this, a large room was at once converted into a separate kitchen, so that the preparation of meat and dairy products should be kept entirely apart. Additional ice boxes were also constructed for the storage of meats, in order that supplies need not be purchased on the Sabbath or holidays and a similar ice box was built in that part of the institution where dairy products were stored.

A supervisor, recommended by Rabbi M. S. Margolies, was engaged and on frequent occasions when the institution was subsequently visited by Rabbi Margolies and Mr. Fischel it was found that the dietary laws were faithfully and carefully observed. More than this and true to the terms of the agreement, immediately following the Passover Holidays, a principal and teachers were employed and a thorough system of religious and

Hebrew instruction was permanently adopted, a step which has resulted in instilling a love for their faith in the hearts of thousands of children, who have since gone out into the world as good Jews, ready to adhere to the religion of their fathers and to battle for its preservation.

Immediately prior to the first Feast of the Tabernacle following these changes, a large Succah was erected. As it was not large enough to accommodate all the children at one time, they took turns in attendance, and nearly every child partook of at least one meal therein.

This victory, won by Mr. Fischel practically single handed and over the opposition of the then most prominent and powerful leaders of New York Jewry, who completely changed their views as a result of his representations, is regarded by him as one of the most significant and important accomplishments of his career.

It is difficult to estimate the effect upon thousands of lives of the way that was thus opened to them to acquire religious knowledge and instruction, nor is it possible to measure the influence exerted in behalf of traditional observance by this recognition of its importance, on the part of those at first hostile to the thought of converting these institutions to Orthodox Jewish principles.

But Mr. Fischel was not alone in deriving pleasure and satisfaction from the success with which his efforts were crowned. The great Jewish public of New York was quick to recognize and approve the new order of conduct of the institutions. This approval was voiced by the many editorial comments in the New York Jewish and English press. Typical of these is an editorial which appeared in the Hebrew Standard.

#### "WITH A MIGHTY HAND"

We are glad to know that there are some right-thinking Jews still left in this community. For years the effort has been made to have our Jewish communal institutions observe the dietary laws, maintain a Jewish ritual and religious instruction for their

charges and, in short, be thoroughly Jewish in fact, not merely in name.

It remained, however, for Mr. Harry Fischel in the movement recently initiated for a third Jewish orphanage in this City, to bring order out of chaos. Year after year, appeal after appeal had been made to the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society to convert their institutions into real Jewish organizations. Children coming to these institutions at a tender age leave them in the formative period of their lives, neither Jews nor Gentiles. They, the charges of a Jewish institution, know nothing of the Jewish religion and the dietary laws. Such procedure, as we have often pointed out, is criminally neglectful on the part of the directors.

Fortunately, the matter wears a different aspect now. At a meeting of a committee of the Council of Jewish Communal Institutions in this city on the 17th, a hearing was had on the question of approving the proposed formation of a new Jewish Orphans' Home. All the talk about duplication of existing institutions was then heard. But this time, the Orthodox communal workers succeeded in no uncertain way with their cause.

Mr. Edward Lauterbach, a director of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, pointed out that his institution is historically committed to maintain the Jewish ritual and dietary laws. In an election held in 1864, the bone of contention was the observance of the laws of Kashruth. Mr. Joseph Seligman was elected president of the Orphan Asylum and its constitution was made to read that the institution was obliged to observe the Jewish dietary laws, as these were then maintained at the Mt. Sinai Hospital. This requirement must still be enforced today, and it will be, we are glad to say, now that the gentlemen associated with the movement for a third orphanage have brought the situation squarely and fairly before those who are charged with the execution of this duty.

And Mr. Fischel has succeeded even beyond their own expectations. Their proposed institution will not be erected. The need for it vanishes as soon as the existing institutions do their bounden duty by this community. The Hebrew Orphan Asylum has pledged itself to install a kosher kitchen and to instruct its wards in the Jewish ritual and religion. The Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society, claiming not to be financially able to incur these expenses, will be aided with the money pledged to the new proposed institution to carry out its duty. When Mr. Joachimson

was defeated in 1864 for the office of president of the Orphan Asylum, he organized the Sheltering Guardian Society, apparently in order to create a truly Jewish Institution. After the lapse of years since then, this institution will become what it has hitherto only purported to be: A Jewish institution in the real sense of the word.

We congratulate Mr. Fischel on the complete success which has attended his effort to achieve this much needed reform. As Rabbi Margolies pointed out to Superintendent Bernstein of the Guardian Society: Kosher is kosher! There are no degrees in kosher.

Our final word on this subject is: let the Mt. Sinai Hospital directors be made to see the light!

## CHAPTER XV

### FIRST VISIT TO PALESTINE

PALESTINE, both because of its holy traditions and the increasing importance attaching to the country by reason of its potentialities as a Jewish homeland, had for a long period exerted a powerful attraction for Mr. Fischel.

In 1909, years before the Balfour Declaration, which was fraught with such mighty import for the Jews of the whole world, conditions in Russia were intolerable and the Jewish population of that country found it all but impossible to earn a livelihood. Not all, of course, were in a position to emigrate to America, though the restrictive immigration laws of the present day were not then in force.

In pondering over the plight of his own and his wife's relatives still in Russia and whom he had sought to assist but who had found it impossible to become self-supporting even with his aid, the idea suddenly came to Mr. Fischel to have them settle in Palestine. This inspiration indirectly led to Mr. Fischel's first visit to the Holy Land.

It was, of course, first necessary that he learn what their attitude might be and to determine this, Mr. Fischel sent each a letter in which he outlined his plans and asked that they advise him as to their decision.

Mr. Fischel's proposal was that he would purchase sufficient land in Palestine to support several families and when this land had been cultivated by them, the other families would follow, until in the end, all would be made self-supporting. By this plan he would accomplish a dual purpose, first he would solve the problem affecting the lives of his relatives by taking them out of Russia, and second, he would be performing a considerable service for the upbuilding of Palestine.

Within a month, Mr. Fischel had received replies from all of his own and his wife's relatives in which they joyfully acceded to the proposal, even going so far as to declare that they would prefer to live on bread and water in the Holy Land than to remain in Russia, no matter how favorable their financial condition in the latter country might be.

Mr. Fischel accordingly decided to send an emissary to Palestine to select suitable land for the purpose he contemplated, and chose as his representative his wife's brother, Mr. Wolf Brass. Mr. Brass sailed for Palestine in October 1909, his instructions being to spend six months there in studying conditions and in formulating his recommendations, it being arranged that Mr. Fischel would join him in July of the following year.

When it became known to Mr. Fischel's friends that he had engaged passage for Palestine and was to leave on June 29, 1910, on the steamship Kaiser Wilhelm, the directors of a number of institutions arranged to tender Mr. Fischel a testimonial on the eve of his departure.

This function took the form of a dinner which was held at the Hotel Astor on the evening of June 27, 1910, and was attended by several hundred men and women representing many important New York institutions with which Mr. Fischel was affiliated. Among them were the Beth Israel Hospital, Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, Hebrew Free Loan Society, Jewish Maternity Hospital, Jewish Community of New York (the Kehilla), Home of the Daughters of Jacob, the Uptown Talmud Torah, Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and numerous others.

Judge Leon Sanders was chairman of the dinner committee and toastmaster of the evening, and among those who made addresses were Rabbi M. S. Margolies, Rabbi H. Periera Mendes, Judge Abram I. Elkus, later Ambassador to Turkey, Judge Otto A. Rosalsky, Supreme Court Justice Nathan Bijur, Congressman Henry M. Goldfogle, A. E. Rothstein and the late Edward Lauterbach. The last speaker presented Mr. Fischel with an engrossed

resolution in a gold frame signed by all the representatives of the institutions responsible for the testimonial. This resolution read as follows:

WHEREAS, Mr. Harry Fischel by his inherent and faithful devotion to the cause of charity and philanthropy has endeared himself to the People of the City of New York—

WHEREAS, his liberal generosity and unerring judgment in the distribution of aid to the poor and needy has had a tendency to make them self-supporting and useful members of our country and

WHEREAS during a period of almost a quarter of a century he has given to the various Jewish Institutions of our City the benefit of his wise counsel and cooperation and liberal contributions, thereby rendering himself useful to all those interested in the material welfare of our Jewish race and

WHEREAS he is about to leave this country on a tour through the Holy Land for the purpose of giving a fresh and lasting stimulus to the efforts of Israel's pioneers in the land of their fathers, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that we, the undersigned representatives of Jewish Institutions, express our love and appreciation for Mr. Harry Fischel, by extending to him in the name of the Jewish Community of the City of New York, our best wishes for a bon voyage and safe and happy return, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be engrossed and presented to Mr. Harry Fischel before his departure for Palestine.

In making the presentation of the resolutions, Mr. Lauterbach, in a feeling and eloquent address, referred to Mr. Fischel's services to the community in the fields of religion and philanthropy, placing special emphasis on what he had been enabled to accomplish in introducing observance of the dietary laws and religious training in those two great institutions, the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society.

Mr. Fischel was so overcome with emotion by the tributes paid him by Mr. Lauterbach and other speakers, that his own remarks

in response were brief. He contented himself with voicing his appreciation of this testimonial on the part of his friends, the number of whom he said, he had not previously realized.

Mr. Fischel left for Palestine the following day. Up to the last moment, Mrs. Fischel had intended to accompany him, but she finally decided otherwise, and, in her place, sent their eldest daughter, Sadie, who had only just graduated from Hunter College and whose education, it was felt, would be properly supplemented by this opportunity to visit the Holy Land and to see a considerable part of the rest of the world. The Kaiser Wilhelm took the two to Hamburg, whence they went by train to Marseilles and from there by boat to Alexandria. At that time there was no train connection between Alexandria and Jerusalem as there is today. Therefore, they concluded their trip by boat to Jaffe.

On this last stage of their journey occurred one of the most affecting and unusual experiences in Mr. Fischel's entire career. Boarding the boat at Alexandria, his attention was directed to what appeared to be an aged Rabbi, with flowing beard, accompanied to the pier by a large number of Roman Catholic priests who bid him an ostentatious bon voyage. Mr. Fischel could not understand what relation such a man might bear to these priests and, so soon as the boat had left its moorings, could not restrain his impulse to approach the seeming Rabbi and question him.

He replied to Mr. Fischel's interrogations by saying: "I am a Catholic Jew."

Never having heard of such a religious combination in all his years and travelings, Mr. Fischel asked the man to define what might be meant by this term. The old fellow replied that he had been converted to Roman Catholicism and that he made his living by doing Christian proselyting in Palestine, which, he added with enthusiasm, was a great field in which to capture Jewish souls at exceedingly small cost.

While Mr. Fischel was astounded by this confession, he found the old man a most interesting character and determined to

engage him in conversation with the idea, if possible, of causing him to return to his own faith. He found him possessed of great Talmudic as well as worldly knowledge, and in their discussion, which lasted most of the night, each tried to convert the other to his way of thinking. Finally Mr. Fischel told the aged man that, at his time of life it was his duty to repent and return to Judaism before it was too late and he should be called to go to another world, where his soul would be denied rest throughout eternity. Mr. Fischel further told the aged man he was positive that, before his end came, he would repent and would send for a Jewish Rabbi to administer to him the last rites.

Before the man left the steamer, his farewell words to Mr. Fischel were:

"I am convinced that you are not to be converted to Christianity, but please do not try to convert me back to Judaism as I am too old to start life over again."

Shortly thereafter on his arrival in Jerusalem, Mr. Fischel was informed that a Christian Missionary, a Jew by birth, was dangerously ill and had sent for a Jewish Rabbi to say Vidooy (the Jewish confessional) with him. Curious to learn who the man was, Mr. Fischel went to his house and what was his surprise and gratification to learn it was the man he had met on the steamer.

On seeing Mr. Fischel, the ill man, his last breath almost spent, turned to him and said: "You won. Your prophecy has been realized. I regret that I have spent thirty years of my life simply for the purpose of exchanging my religion for gold. Now I have neither gold nor religion. I am dying a poor man. This should be an example for others who are tempted to do as I have done."

Arriving with his daughter at Jaffe early in the morning and realizing that he was about to enter Palestine, the one place to which the Jews of all the world pray to the Almighty they may have the privilege of going, Mr. Fischel's heart was filled with gladness and the hardships he had endured in the past dwindled into insignificance compared with the joy he now experienced.

His first thought was to fulfill the mission which had brought him all these miles, namely that of providing for his relatives who were anxiously awaiting word from him in Russia. Mr. Brass had selected the colony known as Petach Tikvah for the settlement and Mr. Fischel went at once to this place. He found the land chosen so completely satisfactory for the purpose that, within an hour, he had concluded its purchase. Within two months, two families had migrated from Russia to Palestine and the settlement had been started.

Mr. Fischel's hopes to found a large colony were never to be fully realized, however, for just when the land had been made productive and when it was ready to provide for four additional families, the World War broke out and his expectations were frustrated.

During his stay in Palestine, Mr. Fischel not only visited all of the institutions there, but with his daughter endeavored to view the principal spots of historic and scriptural interest.

On one occasion they went to the city of Hebron. Here are located the tombs of the patriarchs of old, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are interred there with their wives Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, in addition to Adam and Eve who are also buried there. Upon reaching the steps of this holy place they attempted to ascend, only to find their way barred by an Arab bearing a great sword in his hands and refusing to allow them to mount more than the first six steps.

Mr. Fischel was not greatly exercised by this interception as he knew most of the sacred places of the Holy Land were in Moslem control, but to his daughter, born in America and thoroughly imbued with American ideas of religious freedom, it seemed a wholly unnatural and unwarranted assumption of power on the part of the Moslems to deny Jews admittance to a spot which is the Jews' rightful heritage.

While Mr. Fischel had intended to remain in Palestine for some time, he limited his stay to two weeks, as Miss Fischel urged him to leave, saying: "Let us go back to America, where we can

do what we wish, see what we wish and take advantage of every opportunity."

Acceding to his daughter's request, Mr. Fischel returned by way of Italy, visiting Naples, Venice, Milan, Florence and Rome. It so happened that they arrived in Rome just before the ninth day of the month of Ab, the day on which the Jews mourn for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In the evening they attended the services in the synagogue, probably the largest and most beautiful in Europe, and were greatly impressed. In a room on one side of the synagogue set apart especially for this occasion, with no light other than candles which are held in the hands of the worshippers, the members of the Congregation sit on small stools reading from the Book of Lamentations. The candles, it is their belief, originate from those used in the Temple before its destruction.

The next day, following lamentation services in the morning, they went to the Arch of Titus, erected by the Romans in commemoration of their victory over the Jews at the time of the destruction of the Temple. It seemed to them most appropriate that they should visit this scene on the anniversary of this historic Jewish event, and should take the occasion not only to pray but to shed some tears over the loss of the great temple in Jerusalem.

Leaving Rome, Mr. Fischel and his daughter journeyed again to Hamburg, from which port they set sail for their beloved America.

## XVI

### A CONFERENCE WITH PRESIDENT TAFT

RETURNING to the United States during the month of September, Mr. Fischel found the various activities in which he was interested again ready to make large demands, not only upon his time but upon his purse.

He was, furthermore, shortly to be engaged in a new work which was to exert a potent influence on the future of American Jewry, in that it was to make possible the admission to this land of many Jews who had previously been excluded under the rulings of the Immigration authorities but who nevertheless constituted the most desirable element for future citizenship. These additional labors were also to mark his first meeting with a President of the United States.

Before being called to enter upon his new tasks, however, Mr. Fischel employed the respite to set his own affairs in order. He had not been engaged in business for some years and while the panic of 1907 had spared him from the unhappy consequences affecting nearly all those who had extensive realty investments, his income had not increased but had, on the contrary, undergone some depletion.

In order to continue his communal and charitable activities as in the past, he decided once again to engage in building operations. With the exception of the building of the Grand Theater Mr. Fischel, up to this time, had almost exclusively been engaged in the construction of tenement houses on the Lower East Side. He had not only profited largely in this field but had earned the gratitude of the community for the type of buildings he had erected and which had greatly altered the character of the neighborhood and had set a new standard for sanitary conditions and for living accommodations for the poor generally. These tene-

ments, it may be said, were the forerunner of future movements to improve housing conditions in the congested quarters of the city which even at this day constitutes one of the most important matters in the public eye.

Mr. Fischel had no desire at this time, however, to resume the construction of tenements but looked for new fields to conquer and finally decided upon adventuring into the construction of mercantile buildings in which he was later to have considerable success.

He purchased a plot of ground on Broadway facing Bond Street, on which he erected a twelve story, fireproof office building, modern in all its appointments and containing every known improvement in that type of structure. The venture was not as successful as he had anticipated, for no sooner was the building completed, than the trend of business moved uptown and the neighborhood suffered in consequence.

This experience, while it ended for the time being Mr. Fischel's resumption of building, proved to the advantage of the Jewish public for it caused him once more to devote his time exclusively to communal matters.

It was at this period, early in 1911, that the question of immigration and the problems connected with it imposed a heavy burden upon the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, of which Mr. Fischel was treasurer.

The immigration from Russia, Poland and Lithuania was exceedingly heavy that year and hundreds of immigrants on arriving here were ordered deported to their native lands because of their failure to pass the physical or other requirements the government insisted upon.

While the Society succeeded, through its representations made directly to Washington, in securing the admission of many immigrants who were at first rejected there was one class among those seeking entrance in whose behalf such individual appeals proved futile. Those in this class were merely tagged with a ticket on which were the letters "L.O.P.D." signifying Lack of

Physical Development and their case had up to now been hopeless. Pale and suffering from lack of nourishment, these unfortunates were rejected as they passed before the examiners.

Of special concern to the Society and to Mr. Fischel was the fact that in this class was to be found the most valuable material for the future preservation of Judaism in America as, for the most part, the rejected ones comprised the intellectuals, students, teachers, Rabbis and members of other professions. Their lives having been spent almost entirely indoors, the long journey to America, occupying in those days about two weeks, with the privations they endured on the way, had sapped their scant physical resources to the utmost.

Most of these immigrants were scrupulous as to their religious practices and observance of the Dietary Laws and the last straw which had served to undermine their constitutions and make them appear wan and ill, was the fact that on their journey to America they had eaten little or no food.

On his frequent visits to Ellis Island, Mr. Fischel had especially sympathized with these immigrants and had been much moved by the pitiable stories they recounted to him concerning the dark future they must, of necessity, face if not permitted to remain here.

After a great deal of consideration given to the problem, Mr. Fischel saw, as he believed, a solution. This was that if these immigrants could be afforded the opportunity to rest for several weeks after reaching these shores, meanwhile receiving an abundance of strictly kosher food, and then he re-examined, they would be able to pass the government's requirements, as they would be restored to a normal condition of health and strength.

Having come to this conclusion, Mr. Fischel lost little time in broaching it to the Board of Directors of the Hias. He proposed that the attempt be made to secure permission from the Government to install a kosher kitchen at Ellis Island and also to be granted the privilege of having these immigrants held over for several weeks in order to be re-examined. Mr. Fischel ex-

plained to the directors that, while it would mean a considerable expense to the Society if this permission were granted, the plan would, nevertheless, be well worth while if it was successful in securing even for only a few of those previously barred, the right to remain here.

So forcefully did Mr. Fischel paint the situation to the Board of Directors that they at once agreed to his proposal and a committee was named to go to Washington and seek permission from the government, first to install a kosher kitchen at Ellis Island and, second, to allow the rejected immigrants to remain there two weeks on probation, subject to a re-examination at the expiration of that period.

On February 4, 1911, the Committee, consisting of Leon Kamaiky, Isidore Hirschfield and Mr. Fischel went to Washington and were received in the White House by President William Howard Taft, who met them in the company of Secretary of Commerce and Labor Nagel, under whose jurisdiction Ellis Island then came. Both President Taft and Secretary Nagel were greatly moved by the facts as they were placed before them, admitting the justice and humanity of the demands that were made. Finally, President Taft, turning to Secretary Nagel, requested that the latter do all in his power to work out a plan whereby the suggestions might be carried into effect.

As a result, Secretary Nagel invited the members of the Committee to have lunch with him at the Hotel Willard for the purpose of further discussing the arrangements. At this luncheon Mr. Thompson, Mr. Nagel's secretary, was seated next to Mr. Fischel. True to his practice throughout his life of complying with the Jewish dietary laws, whether at home or abroad, Mr. Fischel found that he could not partake of the repast served on this occasion and contented himself with eating only some fruit.

Mr. Thompson noticing this remarked, "Did you have luncheon before coming here, Mr. Fischel?"

"No," replied Mr. Fischel, proceeding further to utilize this splendid opportunity of explaining to Mr. Thompson more fully

the reasons which had prompted the Committee to visit the President and the Secretary of Commerce and Labor. He stated that he had only just returned from Europe and, as an American and having sufficient means at his disposal, he had been able to travel first class. Even so, he declared, he had been unable to procure the food to which he was accustomed and had lost in weight and vigor in consequence.

Had he been compelled to travel in the steerage and to pass an examination at Ellis Island he, too, Mr. Fischel said, would no doubt have been excluded as were the poor immigrants whose cause he pleaded and who, throughout their long voyage, had to undergo hardships because they had not the means with which to provide themselves with the food their religion prescribes. He continued to describe the hardships confronting these poor people, how they disposed of all their belongings to make the journey, which took months before they ultimately reached America, and finally asked Mr. Thompson how, under the circumstances, the immigrants could be expected to appear vigorous and robust.

The conversation Mr. Fischel had carried on with Mr. Thompson had been overheard by Secretary Nagel, who finally brought the discussion to a conclusion by saying:

"Gentlemen, you have my approval and support in helping to carry out your plan."

Secretary Nagel then made inquiries, before the Committee had left Washington, as to how many such cases were held at Ellis Island at the time and on being informed by telegraph there were forty-seven immigrants awaiting deportation, he issued instructions that they be detained until the kosher kitchen had been installed and they had been given the opportunity to be re-examined.

In less than two weeks after the installation of the Kosher kitchen at Ellis Island, which, by the way, is still maintained at the expense of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, Mr. Fischel had the great satisfaction of seeing many of these

immigrants, restored to strength and health by the food supplied them by the Society, admitted to the United States.

Since that time, thousands of immigrants of this same and highly desirable type have been admitted to the country, largely as a result of this instrumentality and due to the large heartedness and spirit of justice which animated President Taft in consenting to this epochal experiment. In all the history of the United States there has never been a better friend of the Jewish people than President Taft proved himself to be on this and on many other occasions.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A BATTLE FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

MR. FISCHEL had shown by his success in enforcing recognition of Orthodox principles in the orphan asylums his courage and ability in the face of opposition, no matter how powerful. Now, quite unwittingly, he was to become engaged in another struggle in behalf of his convictions as to the proper education of the Jewish young, that for the next several years, was to utilize every ounce of energy and all the fighting qualities he possessed.

Always intensely interested in the rising generation, Mr. Fischel, despite all his many other activities, decided to give a larger share of his time to the problems connected with Jewish religious education. He was then the vice-president of the Uptown Talmud Torah as well as a director of many other Talmud Torahs throughout the city. From a small institution, occupying an old building with few classrooms, the Uptown Talmud Torah had but lately completed the construction of a fine new structure, costing upwards of \$200,000 and situated at 132-134 East One Hundred and Eleventh Street. This building was practically the first structure to be erected in New York solely for the purpose of a Talmud Torah and was in every sense, a modern and adequately equipped religious school.

The expenses of the institution had naturally increased with its expansion from about \$10,000 to \$30,000 annually. The Board of Directors had experienced a great deal of difficulty in raising funds to meet the increased expenses and had found their individual efforts insufficient to meet the institution's needs.

They reached the conclusion that it would be necessary to enlist the cooperation of someone who should give his entire time to the undertaking in order that the income might square with the

budget required if the Uptown Talmud Torah was to function in a manner befitting its new home and enlarged facilities.

In this emergency they turned to Mr. Fischel, the only member of the Board who was not actively engaged in business. Through a committee which waited upon him they offered him the Presidency of the institution, pointing out that it was the belief of the directors that he would not only be able to solve its financial problems but would be in a position to greatly advance its educational standards, its prestige and service to the community.

Mr. Fischel, loath though he was to accept the tremendous additional responsibilities involved in assuming the leadership of so great an enterprise, nevertheless felt it his duty to do so, especially since the directors were unable to secure any other man who was in a position to give to the work the time and effort it demanded.

He, accordingly proposed to the Committee that if the directors would make up the deficiency outstanding at that time, amounting to about \$17,000, he would accept the presidency. The Committee at once agreed to this proposal and Mr. Fischel was elected president of the Uptown Talmud Torah, then the most important Jewish educational institution in America.

His first step on assuming office was to make a thorough investigation of every department and every phase of the work, not alone the institution's financial situation but its educational program, teaching staff and even the management of the building. It soon became apparent that the burden he had taken on his shoulders was an even heavier one than he had anticipated.

On every side he found that chaotic conditions prevailed, conditions that required industry, patience and diplomacy to straighten out before order was restored, involving an effort that consumed much more of his time than he had supposed might reasonably be required. If, however, he was to succeed in causing the institution to occupy the commanding position he pictured for it, there was nothing to be done but to exert his every energy to that end and, accordingly, he at once established regular office

hours in the building from nine until eleven in the morning, although he often remained much later than this hour in order to see all those whom he wished to consult or who wished to consult him.

In addition to interesting all those persons he could personally influence to become members, he engaged and himself paid several solicitors to interest the general public. As a result of this concentrated effort, Mr. Fischel was able to report on March 17, 1912, at the first annual meeting following his election to the presidency, that the annual income had been raised from \$22,000 at the time he took office, to more than \$30,000 an increase of \$8,000 in a single year, a remarkable gain for those times, when it is considered that the appeal had been for funds for maintenance only.

During this period, the school had grown from thirty-eight classes, accommodating 1275 children, to forty-eight classes, with an enrollment of 1707 pupils.

At the annual meeting of that year more than 2,000 persons were present, including such outstanding leaders as the late Jacob H. Schiff, Judge Samuel Greenbaum and others. In his report, Mr. Fischel dwelt upon the necessity for improving the standards of Jewish education in New York, constituting the largest Jewish community in America and advanced the desirability of attracting to the Uptown Talmud Torah, the children of the wealthier class families to whom a modern educational program in conformity with the spirit of the times might reasonably be expected to make a strong appeal.

At the conclusion of his report, Mr. Schiff arose and declared that, while he had attended previous annual meetings of the institution, he had never before heard such a wonderful record of achievement and progress as had been attained in a single year.

Having succeeded during the first year of his presidency in greatly improving the institution's finances, Mr. Fischel decided to devote his second year to its educational curriculum and facilities. It so happened at this time, that Mr. Schiff, who was

keenly interested in all matters pertaining to Jewish education in the City of New York, had just donated the sum of \$50,000 for the purpose of establishing a Bureau of Education connected with the Kehillah. The work of this Bureau was to formulate a standard curriculum to be used in all Jewish institutions.

To accomplish this, Mr. Schiff secured the services of the well-known educator, Dr. S. Benderly, who had been notably successful in carrying out a similar program in the city of Baltimore. Mr. Fischel immediately offered Dr. Benderly the use of the Uptown Talmud Torah as the laboratory for installing the new system. This arrangement brought so much public notice to the institution that the applications from parents who wished to enroll their children as pupils many times exceeded the ordinary capacity of the school.

In order, however, that no applicant should be turned away, Mr. Fischel accepted Dr. Benderly's suggestion that a course be provided, with classes meeting two or three times a week in the auditorium. Thus nearly a thousand additional children were accommodated. This was a preparatory course for the younger children and Dr. Benderly felt that it would be made much more interesting and attractive if a stereopticon machine were provided with slides illustrating some of the outstanding events in Jewish history, together with Jewish customs and religious rites.

Since this constituted a decided innovation in the system of education then prevailing and, as Mr. Fischel did not care to invest the Talmud Torah's funds in what was in the nature of an experiment, he purchased the stereopticon machine himself and presented it to the institution. The innovation was immediately successful, the children being enabled to better visualize and understand the lessons which were imparted to them.

They gained, furthermore, a much more graphic realization of Jewish historical facts than was possible through oral instruction alone. Mr. Fischel derived from this comparatively small expenditure a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction in the appreciation the children themselves expressed and in the benefit they

unquestionably obtained through what, at that time, was regarded as a most radical step in religious teaching.

Another notable accomplishment of the second year of Mr. Fischel's presidency was the institution of a children's synagogue, the congregation of which was made up of more than four hundred boys and girls, and which has since grown to much larger proportions. The boys, proud of the opportunity to display their ability in directing the congregation, established strictly Orthodox services with American methods of order and decorum. At first the services were held only on the Sabbath but later daily services were held, attended each morning by a large number of boys. In order that these boys might get to Public School on time, a few individuals defrayed the cost of serving them breakfast. This practice is in operation up to the present day.

The progress made by Mr. Fischel in adding to the attractiveness of the courses and in providing many other improvements in the institution, called forth expressions of praise not alone from the members and Board of Directors, but from the pupils themselves. The latter voiced their sentiments in the publication "Hope," edited by the boys of the institution. In the December 1912 issue of the publication the following article, expressive of the youthful enthusiasm of the editors, appeared:

Many men have come and many men have gone, during the still short career of our Talmud Torah, but there are not many whose memory will linger longer in the minds of our children, than that of Mr. Harry Fischel. There are few, if any, who have done as much for us as has the energetic President of the Uptown Talmud Torah.

Every child and student that attends our school loves and reveres his name. He has done more for them than possibly any other individual. In times of need it is always he who has stepped to the front and turned the tide. He takes special interest in all our activities and has been the cause of many needed reforms. It is through his unceasing and untiring efforts, our school has become so popular in the house of our people. Seeking to do some good for our school and the Jewish community as a whole,

he donated to us a stereopticon machine. With the help of this machine, lecturing has been added to the list of our Talmud Torah's activities and many instructive illustrated lectures are now given in our auditorium.

It is chiefly through him that many additional Harlem children will soon be enabled to get a true Jewish education by the plan to partition our gymnasium into more classrooms. Besides always being ready to listen to the appeals of our young folk, he has furthered the work of many of our Jewish societies by granting them a meeting room.

While, during the second year of his stewardship, Mr. Fischel mainly concerned himself with the educational side of the institution, this did not prevent his finding time to continue to improve its financial condition, so that at the annual meeting held on February 10, 1913, he was able to report a \$4,000 surplus, in spite of the fact that expenses had been increased to \$38,000 annually. The income of \$42,000 for the year represented a gain of \$12,000 over the preceding year. At the same time, the number of classes had been increased from 48 to 52, with an enrollment of more than 1800 children, exclusive of the nearly 1000 additional pupils who attended the special classes.

So greatly had the Uptown Talmud Torah risen in public esteem by this time that this second annual meeting, under Mr. Fischel's regime, was by far the most largely attended one in its history.

Once again Jacob H. Schiff graced the meeting by his presence and as usual made a notable address in which he praised anew the achievements recounted, especially stressing the valuable cooperation his Bureau of Education had received and the importance of so teaching the principles of Judaism that they would most strongly appeal to the Jewish child in America. Mr. Schiff's address was as follows:

ADDRESS OF MR. JACOB H. SCHIFF AT ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
UPTOWN TALMUD TORAH

*March 17, 1912*

I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind and generous consideration of me. I have, perhaps proven my friendship to you, but I am only one amongst you who is trying to do his duty, and nothing more. I have not come here to make an address; I do not make addresses.

You have referred, Mr. Chairman, to my promotion of the Bureau of Education of the Kehillah. Perhaps nothing that I have done in recent years gives me more satisfaction or has made me more proud than the work of the Bureau.

Last night I happened to be invited to a reception to Marconi, the inventor. I listened to addresses on the progress that has been made during recent years from the telegraph to the telephone, and from the telephone to the wireless telegraph, which now sends messages in ten minutes from one point of the world to another, far outrivalling the cable, and anything else that has been invented.

Thus, Mr. President, it is with Jewish education. Just think, a few years ago, perhaps not more than twenty or twenty-five, even less, what condition Jewish education was in, in this city, and see the progress it has made from disorderly to orderly conditions, from inefficiency to efficiency.

We often hear people speak of Reform and Orthodox forms of instruction in Judaism. That does not mean that there is a different method of instruction in the traditions of our law which was given to us on Mount Sinai.

As I have said, order, method, decorum, does not mean the destruction of orthodoxy. It means just the reverse. It means the promotion of the love for our Jewish religion and that, as I understand it, is what the Bureau of Education means. I am mortified, more than I can express, to see how the unselfish work of these men, of Dr. Magnes, of Dr. Benderly, of Prof. Friedlander, who are giving their days and their nights to it, is attacked in certain sections as being destructive of good Orthodox Judaism. If we want our children, under American conditions, to retain that love and that attraction which we have for the

faith of our fathers and forefathers, we must practice such methods as those in which you have been the pioneers.

And because of this, my interest is so warm in your work. Because of this, I saw that you meant not alone to remain attached to the traditions of the Jewish religion as it has come down to us from our forefathers; not alone that you would honor it, but that you would teach it in such a manner that the American Jewish child would love it and remain in the religious school and the Synagogue, instead of losing himself in Atheism. Because of this, I was glad to give you my support.

Mr. President, I have listened with great interest to your report. You really, you personally, did establish the connecting link; you have so efficiently and courageously forged one of the steels that merge American conditions with Jewish conditions and yet enable us to remain good Jews. You have personally accomplished this in our community and you have set a noble and splendid example.

Mr. Fischel, in his report delivered at this meeting, laid special emphasis on the necessity of enlarging the Talmud Torah in order to provide for a special school for girls of high school age whom he deemed it desirable to be taught in classrooms separate from the boys.

A still more important recommendation was that urging the establishment of a branch of the Uptown Talmud Torah in a location which should be more accessible to the homes of the better-off Jewish families. In this connection Mr. Fischel pointed out that it was most necessary for the future of Judaism that children of the well-to-do class, receive a sound religious education as it was from among this class that the future generations of leaders of Jewish philanthropy and directors of Jewish institutions would have to be mainly recruited.

These future leaders, Mr. Fischel went on, must have a thorough knowledge and love of Jewish traditions which could only be obtained through a proper religious education. It was not to be expected that the youth in poor circumstances who was compelled to work his way through school and college in order to get

an education, should at once take up the reins of Jewish institutional life or devote his time to communal work.

On the other hand, the young men of the wealthier class, with their greater means and leisure, Mr. Fischel pointed out, might, if properly trained, be expected to develop into leaders of the community and proper guardians of the communal institutions. He regarded it as of the utmost importance, for this reason, that the opportunity for a true Jewish education be extended into the neighborhood where the wealthier Jews resided and suggested the Lenox Avenue section as the locality best suited to the purpose of expansion of the Talmud Torah's activities.

In view of the fact that these recommendations met with the general approval of the entire gathering and were repeatedly seconded in the addresses of the speakers who followed, Mr. Fischel was much surprised later to find an undercurrent of opposition to the plans among the members of the Board of Directors.

This resulted in a certain amount of ill-feeling on the part of several of the older directors who were unaccustomed to the methods which had resulted in such a speedy growth for the institution. From this time on, Mr. Fischel was unable to secure a unanimous vote by the directors on the various matters he placed before them.

Always a firm believer in the rights of the minority, Mr. Fischel had long held to the custom that where he could not get the approval of everyone present at a Board meeting, no resolution should be allowed to pass. In order, however, that the progress of the institution might not be impeded he was compelled to alter this practice in connection with the Talmud Torah, and to rely upon a majority vote. The majority continued to staunchly support him in his program.

Shortly after the second annual meeting, Mr. Fischel received convincing proof that his recommendations were strongly approved by the outstanding leaders of New York Jewry.

This proof came in the form of a letter from Jacob H. Schiff,

who was departing for Europe and who enclosed a check for \$25,000 to Mr. Fischel's order, at the same time expressing his warmest endorsement of Mr. Fischel's plan to establish a branch of the Uptown Talmud Torah for the children of the wealthier Jewish families. Mr. Schiff, in his letter, stated that if Mr. Fischel could raise an additional \$25,000 he might make use of the check for the purpose of establishing a branch of the institution on the west side.

Mr. Fischel lost no time in calling a meeting of the directors to place Mr. Schiff's proposal before them. This meeting was held on April 3, 1913. After reading Mr. Schiff's letter, which was received with every evidence of enthusiasm, Mr. Fischel declared it to be incumbent upon the directors to carry out their part of the bargain and to raise the additional \$25,000 which was a condition of Mr. Schiff's gift. He realized, however, that it would be a difficult task to raise so large a sum among them and had come prepared for this emergency.

In the interim between the receipt of Mr. Schiff's letter and the meeting, Mr. Fischel had held a conference with the members of his family and had decided, with them, to build an annex adjoining the existing institution for which he was prepared to defray the entire cost. Mr. Fischel had, indeed, gone so far as to prepare a set of plans for the proposed building, arranged to meet the requirements of the increased activities of the school.

With this purpose in view, Mr. Fischel made the proposition to the Board that he would erect this building at his own expense contributing for the purpose the sum of \$10,000 or whatever might be required, but that, in order to meet the terms of Mr. Schiff's gift, the balance of \$15,000 toward the required \$25,000 was to be raised by them. Mr. Fischel's offer was enthusiastically accepted and \$12,000 was immediately subscribed by the directors as they sat around the table.

With the assurance of this sum and the check of \$25,000 from Mr. Schiff in his possession, Mr. Fischel began to envisage the realization of both his dreams, that of the annex to the Talmud

Torah and the erection of a West Side Branch. It was determined at the meeting of the Board that news of Mr. Schiff's munificence and the plans the institution had made for the use of the gift, were of sufficient importance to give to the public with the result that once more the Uptown Talmud Torah received many columns of space in the press of the entire country.

The Hebrew Standard issue of April 18, 1913, commented editorially upon the announcement as follows:

"The subscriptions to the work of the Uptown Talmud Torah, which we duly chronicled in our last issue, call for a word or two of comment. All possible credit is due and extended to each of the generous donors: Jacob H. Schiff's donation of \$25,000 is, as customary, a princely gift. Without wishing in the slightest degree to be invidious, we deem it appropriate, however, to call special attention to the gift of \$10,000 by Harry Fischel. The latter gentleman will gladly concede we take it, that his fortune is not as large, as say, Mr. Schiff's. Therefore, when Harry Fischel gives \$10,000 to a communal institution, it means so much more to him and should signify much more to the organization benefited. However, this gift of Mr. Fischel's shows that the Russian Jews and the representatives of the more recent immigrant section among our co-religionists are endeavoring to do their full share in the cause of Jewish education in this city. That Russian Jews like Harry Fischel do their duty is no more than one anticipates and expects from men who have the means, and above all who have the heart. Zedakah, for such it truly is, is a living force for them!"

Mr. Fischel at once set to work to begin construction of the annex as well as to prepare for the erection of the West Side Branch and appointed a committee, with Mr. Leon Tuchman as chairman, which was charged with the duty of carrying out the latter undertaking. Property was purchased at 42-44-46 West 115th Street, as a site for the branch, and Mr. Fischel personally prepared the plans for it. These provided for a school to accommodate more than 600 children, club rooms, a gymnasium

and a children's synagogue, which also was to be used as an auditorium.

Construction of the Annex began immediately after the Pass-over Holidays and Mr. Adolph Lewisohn laid the cornerstone on June 15, with appropriate and impressive ceremonies in the presence of a large number of invited guests. Addresses were made by Rabbi M. S. Margolies, president of the school's board of education, Dr. H. Periera Mendes, Isidore Herschfield, Honorary Secretary of the institution and others.

In his remarks, Mr. Lewisohn said, in part:

"I have watched the growth of this institution very carefully and I am very proud to have the honor of laying the cornerstone for this important annex. The president and donor of this new building, my personal friend, Mr. Harry Fischel, has set an example to all Jewish leaders, illustrating that when one gives of his entire time and energy to an institution it becomes a part and parcel of himself, and he is even giving above his means in order to extend the accommodations of this institution.

"Let us hope that this example set by the president of the Uptown Talmud Torah will serve as a lesson and incentive to others among our Jewish brethren, that they may do likewise for the cause of Jewish education, which, without a doubt, is today the most vital problem confronting the American Jew."

It had been Mr. Fischel's custom to take his vacation during the summer months but so engrossed was he with the project he had in hand, that he dispensed with his annual rest and remained in the city most of the summer giving his attention solely to the task of completing the new annex and Branch. By October, he was able to view with satisfaction the two buildings finished and to appoint a committee to arrange for a double celebration. This celebration took place on November 2, 1913.

In the morning of that day, the West Side Branch was opened to the people of the neighborhood in order that they might be acquainted with the facilities the building was to offer in the way of filling a long felt want in that part of the city. In the afternoon, the Board of Directors marched in a body from the main building to the Branch where, after a prayer and a short address

by the venerable Rabbi Margolies, Mr. Fischel delivered the key of the building to Jacob H. Schiff, who had returned from his vacation in time to take part in the ceremony. Entering the auditorium, Mr. Fischel also unveiled a tablet which had been erected in Mr. Schiff's honor and in connection with this unveiling delivered the following address:

"I welcome you all to this new building which is a branch of that well-known institution, the Uptown Talmud Torah.

"We are indeed making history today. We are not merely dedicating a Talmud Torah,—a school house for Jewish learning—but we are on the threshold of a new era in Jewish education. Today, for the first time in our communal life, we are making provisions for children whose parents God has endowed with material gifts, to receive a systematic and, above all, a thorough Jewish education.

"At present, the children of the poor have far more opportunities for getting a thoroughly Jewish training than their wealthier brethren. Their parents make every effort to place their children in a Talmud Torah, even though same be located at a great distance from them. We have children at our main building on 111th Street who come as far as 25 blocks for the purpose of imbibing Jewish learning. This, however, is not the case with the children of the rich. They do not send their children to a Talmud Torah because they are obsessed with the idea that a Talmud Torah is made only for the poor. Some parents are more broad-minded and do send the children, but only when they live near the Talmud Torah. Some parents send the children to a Chedar, located usually in a basement or some other unsanitary place, which does not meet with the desire of the parents and is not to the satisfaction of the children. For such reasons, then, a vast majority of the children of the rich are brought up without any Jewish moral and religious training.

"We, the Board of Directors of the Uptown Talmud Torah, after much deliberation, came to the conclusion that the only way to solve this problem would be to erect a building especially adapted for this class of children of whom there are at least 25,000 within 10 square blocks of this spot.

"We were powerless, however, to realize our desire as we did

not have the necessary funds to construct such a building, until our friend—the friend of Jewish education, the well-known philanthropist,—Mr. Jacob H. Schiff, became interested in our work and came to our assistance with a donation of \$25,000. Our Board of Directors succeeded in raising a like sum of \$25,000 and then it was possible to realize our dream and to construct this building, well ventilated, strictly fireproof, with all sanitary improvements and a large playground.

“The School is well equipped with a competent principal and staff of teachers, who will give Jewish instruction by the most up-to-date methods to about 800 boys and girls, whose parents are well able to pay a minimum sum of \$3.00 per month for the instruction of their children, thus making this school self-supporting.

“My friends, the success of this, our new venture, rests with you. You will either eagerly grasp the God-given opportunity and crown our work with your interest, or you will reject it by failing to send your children here. I trust you will do the former and thus comply with the wishes of our sages, who commanded us in the following phrase: ‘Be careful, that the Torah shall not come forth from the poor only!’

“My friends: I have a duty to perform which I consider a great honor and privilege. I have to report to you that at a special meeting of the Board of Directors, it was unanimously resolved that, whereas the erection of this building was made possible through the generosity of Mr. Jacob H. Schiff, that in appreciation thereof a tablet be placed on the walls of this auditorium, which I herewith unveil, and which reads as follows: ‘A tribute to the services and devotion of Jacob H. Schiff, to the cause of Jewish education.’

“Mr. Schiff, as a further token of our esteem and appreciation, I take great pride in delivering to you a key to this building as you always held the key to the situation confronting Jewish education, and I am sure that those who are here assembled, as well as the thousands of children who will derive the benefit of your generosity, join me in wishing that you may hold the key for many, many years to come.”

Following this celebration, most of those present adjourned to take part in the dedication of the Annex which occurred imme-

diately afterward. These exercises were followed by a dinner tendered to Mr. and Mrs. Fischel by members of the Board of Directors. So complete was the building in every respect that the dinner was held in the new structure.

At this function Mr. Fischel was honored in a manner that came as a complete surprise to him. The lights were suddenly extinguished and when they were flashed on again he saw on the wall opposite his place at the table, a life size portrait of himself done in oil. The thought that, despite the differences he had had with some members of the Board, his work for the institution had nevertheless been appreciated to the extent that he should be thus honored, caused him intense gratification and he was so affected that he had great difficulty in replying to the address of presentation.

Mr. Fischel then delivered the deed of the building and the double celebration that focused the eyes of the entire Jewish population of the city upon the Uptown Talmud Torah, was brought to an end.



THE FISCHEL ANNEX TO THE UPTOWN TALMUD TORAH,  
140 East 111th Street, New York City, completed in 1913.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### MEETING A CRISIS

THE apparently happy conclusion of the many months of arduous effort put forth in behalf of the Uptown Talmud Torah with Mr. Fischel again overcoming the opposition to his program voiced by some of the directors, gave promise that the institution would realize his fondest hopes for its future usefulness.

The two new buildings commenced to function at once and filled a long felt want in both localities. The Fischel Annex was in use twelve of the twenty-four hours of the day and the West Side Branch, with the exception of the school itself, was likewise taken advantage of to its capacity by the young people of that part of the city.

There were still difficulties to be overcome, however, before the school on the West Side was to justify its existence. These difficulties mainly arose from the fact that the part of the public which the school was especially designed to serve, was not accustomed to sending its children to religious classes or paying for religious education and it became necessary to educate the parents as well as the children, before the new branch was to become entirely successful.

In order to accomplish this and to provide every possible advantage that might be expected by persons of wealth for their children, Mr. Fischel appointed a special Board of Education for the Branch, with instructions to work out a curriculum that should not alone contain every educational facility provided in the main building of the Talmud Torah, but a number of additional subjects and improvements intended to appeal to the richer element in the community. In this connection, Mr. Fischel was able to secure the valuable cooperation and assistance of Dr. S.

Benderly, who not alone gave personal advice, but recommended Mr. A. Duschkind for the position of principal of the school.

By Mr. Fischel's close study of the problem and the changes in policy, which he effected, more than three hundred children were within a short time enrolled in the school, paying from three to ten dollars a month for their tuition. This revenue not alone put the Branch upon a paying basis but resulted in the accumulation of a considerable surplus which, it was planned, should go to help support the work carried on in the main building.

This success was, however, to be short lived and Mr. Fischel was once more compelled to engage in a struggle to uphold the principles he believed to be right, a struggle which taxed his energies to the utmost, seriously undermined his hitherto vigorous constitution and left him sick at heart and wearied in body and mind.

In spite of the tremendous strides which had been made by the Uptown Talmud Torah during the years of Mr. Fischel's administration, the fact that its finances were sound, its membership greatly increased and its accomplishments recognized by all sections of the community, the dissension which had first made itself apparent some months before, was now revived.

Some of the older directors saw in every step which Mr. Fischel had taken to broaden the curriculum and to introduce improvements in the systems of education, a blow at their conception of what was proper. They failed even to be satisfied with the knowledge that Mr. Fischel had made no move without first obtaining the consent and hearty approval of Rabbi M. S. Margolies, the dean of the Orthodox Jewish Rabbinate of America, who was the chairman of the Talmud Torah's Board of Education.

Mr. Fischel at a meeting of the Board of Directors held on February 15, 1914 indulged in a heart to heart talk with them. He carefully went into everything he had done since assuming the office of President three years before, explaining how his first year had been devoted almost solely to placing the institution on a sound financial footing and how, at the conclusion of this period,

he had enjoyed the appreciation, support and confidence of every member of the Board.

This, he said, had also been true of his second year in office when, besides further strengthening the finances of the institution, he had devoted much effort to working out a suitable program of instruction. The confidence then imposed in him, he declared, had been the incentive which had caused him to work still harder toward the realization of even larger usefulness for the institution and, at a time when he was already worn out by his labors and had not expected to continue in office.

He then explained how the offer of Mr. Schiff to contribute \$25,000, provided an equal sum was raised by the directors, had filled him with new hope and ambition for the attainment of the objects in view and how he had decided to continue to serve as President. He reminded the Board that, not only had he contributed a large sum of money for the building of the Annex, but that he had sacrificed his summer vacation in order that this building and the West Side Branch might be completed by the Fall. He had not, he stated, expected or looked for any thanks for this labor of love, undertaken to achieve the fulfillment of a holy purpose, but, on the other hand, he certainly had not anticipated being subjected to such obstructive measures as those with which he had been rewarded.

Mr. Fischel then made clear to the Board that he would refuse the presidency for another term.

This plain declaration created a tremendous commotion among the members of the Board, causing the meeting to be prolonged until nearly two A. M. Those directors constituting the majority of the Board pleaded with Mr. Fischel to remain in office and gave him their assurance that they would do everything possible to help him in the performance of his duty.

Mr. Fischel, however, was convinced, despite these earnest pleas on the part of his supporters, that complete harmony could not again be expected to prevail and therefore decided that he

would resign at the annual meeting scheduled to be held a week later, on February 22, 1914.

At this meeting were, Mr. Jacob H. Schiff, Mr. Adolph Lewisohn, Judge Samuel Greenbaum, Judge Otto A. Rosalsky and Dr. Judah L. Magnes among many others of prominence in communal and institutional work.

After reading his annual report, showing the progress of the institution in the year just ended, Mr. Fischel made the following statement:

“My friends, from the bottom of my heart I thank you for your kind attention in listening to the lengthy report of our activities during the past year, and I would ask your indulgence for a few minutes more as I have an additional statement to make.

“After mature deliberation, I have fully decided to retire from the high office of President of this institution, which I have occupied for the last three years. During that period, the Uptown Talmud Torah has progressed marvelously in transmitting to thousands of our young, the traditions, culture and history of our people. It has built up a healthy Jewish environment through its social work. It has made history in establishing a Talmud Torah on a self-supporting basis for the children of those parents who cannot afford to pay for their tuition. It has acquired an annex to this building which gives a thorough Jewish and moral education to nearly 500 girls. It has also placed the administrative work on a business-like and systematic basis. The membership income has increased from \$6,486 per annum to \$14,712. The number of pupils has increased from 1000 to over 2100, besides the 900 in the extension school, which is conducted by the Bureau of Education. I have also succeeded in inducing the Council of Jewish Communal institutions to take the Uptown Talmud Torah as one of its members and this is the only educational institution that the Council has ever admitted.

“With the aid of the Bureau of Education of the Kehillah, I am happy to say that I was also able to elevate our institution to the position which it now occupies among educational institutions. Nevertheless, there is still a great deal of room for progress and advancement.

"However, in order to maintain this high standard of efficiency and to carry on the work on this basis, a president must have the cooperation and undivided support of the entire Board of Directors, a Board of Directors who are open to conviction, fair in their views and liberal in their ideas and principles, who are able to be convinced that an institution like ours can be conducted under the best and most modern methods, without sacrificing any religious principles whatsoever, and who will not allow some of their colleagues to condemn a system of education which was introduced by a man who has devoted all his life to that purpose and who has been largely misunderstood and unappreciated.

"In view of the impossibility of obtaining the cooperation of the entire Board of Directors I have, therefore, finally decided to retire. I hope that my successor in the Presidency will be firm enough to withstand unfounded prejudices against the efficient methods now in force in our institution, so that those of the Board of Directors who as yet have failed to recognize the progress which has been made by this new system, will eventually realize their mistake and will gladly embrace and continue the standard of education which I have labored unceasingly to uphold and maintain."

No sooner had Mr. Fischel finished the announcement of his resignation than Mr. Schiff asked for the floor and said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen:

"We are old friends and your president was good enough to say that I have been with you now many a time each year at the annual meetings. I have spoken always to you from a full heart because of the pleasure I have had in seeing the progress of this institution. It has grown from little beginnings to this great civilizing and educational center.

"I must say that I am very much taken back by this announcement which has just been sprung upon us.

"I have not known of any intention of Mr. Fischel to retire from the leadership of this institution. I only knew it since he announced it a few minutes ago. I cannot imagine this Talmud Torah without Mr. Fischel at the head of it. I do not understand the motives that have induced him to retire, but a few words

which he said in making the announcement indicated that there is a difference in the Board of Directors as to the methods by which this institution shall be conducted. I do not propose to pronounce judgment upon anything I do not know both sides of, but if, as your president has just said, some of your directors are not in accord with the new methods,—and by this I suppose is meant the methods, such as have been brought about by the Bureau of Education—perhaps I am mistaken—that these methods have not the approval of the entire Board of Directors of this institution, I should consider this nothing less than a calamity to the Jews of this city. For the standing of the Jew of this city rests now and hereafter, more than anything else, upon the quality, not the quantity of the religious education he is going to give his children.

“We cannot take any step backwards. Evolutions and revolutions never work backwards, and I will say to these directors, I do not care who they are, I do not know how many of them there are, I will say to these directors, if they stand in the way of modern Orthodox Jewish education, that the community will sweep over them like the ocean over a little islet in its midst. (Applause)

“If this institution has progressed and is obtaining the confidence of those who are not entirely in accord (because they know nothing of it) with Jewish education as it is given here, I mean the confidence of the German Jews, who have largely supported it, it is to a great extent due to the fact that they knew that Mr. Fischel is Orthodox, and that his immediate supporters are Orthodox Jews—they are Americans, progressive Americans and they want to have a Jew a good Jew—a good Jew, and a good American as head of this institution (applause) and you cannot be good Americans if you do not educate your children in the way of Judaism.

“Now, Mr. Fischel, don't be discouraged in your great and noble work. Possibly you are not appreciated by some of the Directors, but the people are with you. I do not know how many Directors or what Directors are opposing you, but I will say to them that, if they are standing in the way of Modern Jewish Education, as I said before, the Community will sweep over them, like the ocean sweeps over a little island. If this association has increased, progressed and spread its influence among the Jews, it is in the greatest part due to Mr. Fischel, whom I know is

trusted by thousands as a good Jew and a good American. I will say frankly that I should consider it nothing less than a calamity if unprogressive ideas within the Board of Directors were to force Mr. Fischel's retirement."

No sooner had Mr. Schiff concluded his remarks than he was followed in due order by Judge Rosalsky, Judge Greenbaum and Dr. Magnes, who not only echoed Mr. Schiff's plea that Mr. Fischel should not resign but, if anything, couched their views in stronger language even than Mr. Schiff had used.

Some small idea of the consternation which prevailed in Jewish circles over Mr. Fischel's unexpected action is given by the newspaper accounts of the meeting which appeared the following day and which were supplemented by no end of editorial comment in New York and in other cities to which the reports were carried by the Associated Press wires.

Several of the headlines in the principal New York dailies are here reproduced together with the full and very accurate account published by the New York Times.

#### NEW YORK HERALD

Harry Fischel, President of Harlem Institute, resigns as protest against all prejudice. Jacob H. Schiff urges his retention.

#### NEW YORK AMERICAN

Harry Fischel resigns after clash in Hebrew Institute. Mr. Jacob H. Schiff and Judge Rosalsky deplore his action.

#### NEW YORK TELEGRAM

Sensation in Hebrew Institute when Harry Fischel president of Harlem Institute, resigns. Progressive members urge him to reconsider.

The article from the New York Times was as follows:

FISCHEL TO RESIGN FROM TALMUD TORAH  
*Tells Annual Meeting Directors are Not in Favor  
of His Progressive Ideas*

JACOB H. SCHIFF PROTESTS

*Banker Asserts that Fischel's Retirement would be a Calamity to the  
Jews of the City.*

Harry Fischel, President of the Uptown Talmud Torah Association, announced at its annual meeting yesterday at 132-142 East 111th Street, that he intended to resign his office because of prejudices within the organization against what he termed as progressive ideas and up-to-date methods. The announcement was a surprise to the members of the association. Jacob H. Schiff and Judge Otto A. Rosalsky both expressed regret that a condition had arisen within the board of Directors that could provoke Mr. Fischel's retirement. Mr. Schiff said that, if the association lost the services of its president it would be a calamity to the Jews of this city, and Judge Rosalsky offered a motion placing the audience on record as opposed to the acceptance of Mr. Fischel's resignation.

Mr. Fischel's announcement was made after he had read his annual report showing the steady growth of the association.

Mr. Schiff followed Mr. Fischel and began at once upon the President's resignation. (Here follow excerpts from Mr. Schiff's remarks).

Before he attempted to introduce his motion opposing Mr. Fischel's resignation, Judge Rosalsky said:

"I want to say to the members of the Board of Directors of the Talmud Torah that there should be no differences among them. It will be a serious mistake upon your part if you do not insist upon Mr. Fischel's continuing as President of this association. The Russian Jews were deprived by his coming to America twenty-nine years ago and American Jewdom is the richer therefore, I beg this audience not to let this man go."

The Rev. Dr. Judah L. Magnes spoke of the need for a larger view of Judaism without petty differences disturbing the great work before the association. He said:

"If it be true that there is a dissension in your midst, I am sure, and I know that Mr. Schiff is sure, that the differences are honest and upheld with the best of intentions; but your disputes over methods should be dropped in the knowledge that Jews all over this country are modelling their institutions after this Talmud Torah. In view of this it would be well that any controversy you may have be stilled at once.

"If the Board of Directors are fighting about a method, if they are disputing over a dollar, if they disagree because they do not like the looks of a certain teacher or his accent, they should remember that, while they are airing their petty differences, 185,000 Jewish boys and girls are running around the streets of this city as little pagans and infidels without the opportunity for Jewish teaching and training."

Other speakers were Rabbi M. S. Margolies, Harold Debrest, the Rev. H. Masliansky and Rabbi B. Pearl.

Two editorials from the English-Jewish Press, one from the American Hebrew and one from the Hebrew Standard, are here given:

#### AMERICAN HEBREW

Mr. Harry Fischel should not allow himself to feel discouraged because he does not at once secure the cooperation of all his associates in the progressive work of the Uptown Talmud Torah. This organization, under his presidency, has grown from strength to strength in the development of modern educational standards and general good work. It was, we believe, the first to cooperate with the Kehillah's Bureau of Education and to put in effect the standardized methods which the Bureau advised. Any backward slip now would be most deplorable and we earnestly hope that the Board of Directors will not only decline to accept Mr. Fischel's resignation, but that they will sustain his policies in every way.

#### HEBREW STANDARD

##### *Mr. Fischel's Resignation*

What is the trouble that Mr. Fischel has had with some of the directors of the Harlem Institute? Is it something like the story of Sisyphus, who was perpetually laboring in pushing a stone up-

hill but which always rolled down again to the bottom just when he was trying to place it on the top of the hill? Or, will the differences between Mr. Fischel and some of the directors be settled amicably? No details were forthcoming at last Sunday's meeting as to the causes of the trouble, but it was gathered from the speeches of Mr. Schiff, Dr. Magnes and others that some of the ignorant zealots of the Old Brigade—the Sanhedrin of Mount Morris Park—object to the Uptown Talmud Torah being made a "social centre" as well as a school for the teaching of Hebrew. Mr. Fischel himself said that his resignation was actuated by the fact that he found it impossible to convince the full Board of Directors that an institution like the Harlem Talmud Torah "can be conducted with the best and most up-to-date methods without sacrificing in the least any religious principles whatsoever." In a general way, Mr. Fischel indicated that the clash with the Board of Directors had come over his attempts in the capacity of President, "to combine ideas of Judaism and Americanism in the management of the Association, and his efforts to extend its activities in other than purely religious fields." The public, however, would like to know something more concerning the trouble with the directors. Unquestionably as Mr. Schiff, who was taken aback with the announcement of Mr. Fischel's resignation, said.—"It is nothing less than a calamity if unprogressive ideas within the Board were to force Mr. Fischel's retirement," as it was difficult to imagine the Uptown Talmud Torah without Mr. Fischel at the head of it.

Let us, therefore, hope that the prophecy of Mr. Schiff to the effect that, if the directors of the Uptown Talmud Torah "are standing in the way of modern Orthodox Jewish education, the community will sweep over them like the ocean sometimes sweeps over a little island in a storm," will have the effect of changing the minds of the directors so that Judge Rosalsky, may succeed in keeping Mr. Fischel at the head of the institution.

The day after the meeting, Mr. Fischel received the following letter from the Bureau of Education.

## BUREAU OF EDUCATION

Mr. Harry Fischel,  
118 East 93rd Street,

February 23, 1914.

My dear Mr. Fischel:

I am writing this letter to you in order to give you my view of the main incident at the Annual Meeting yesterday—your resignation in public. At first, I was of the opinion that it might have been wiser for you not to do so publicly, but merely to state to the Board that, in view of the fact that some members of the Board disagree with you on account of your progressive ideas about Jewish education, you do not see your way clear to serve as President any longer. This, of course, would have permitted the Annual meeting to proceed in the usual way and none of the public present would have had an inkling about the difference of opinion in the Board. After reconsidering the matter, however, I feel that you were probably justified in doing the thing the way you did.

I have no doubt that you strengthened the cause of Jewish education considerably yesterday afternoon. Instead of permitting all those petty things to go on in the dark, you forced a flood of light on the subject and you have once for all made the issue clear—whether in this country we are to raise a Jewish generation that will be loyal to Judaism and at the same time fully equipped to take part in the upbuilding of this great Republic, or whether we must continue a system of education that may have rendered good service four hundred or five hundred years ago, when we were locked up in Ghettos, but has proven powerless in this country, as may be proved by the lamentable failure of Jewish education in the past twenty-five years.

I could see yesterday that the public was with you. The people demanded progress, for they have learned to their sorrow that the old way has never gotten their children to remain loyal to Judaism. I hope that you will forget these petty things which wasted so much of your energy during the past three years. I have no doubt that time will demonstrate to those gentlemen who are opposed to you that, in opposing you, they have opposed the progress of Jewish education.

I want to assure you, Mr. Fischel, that the great cause of Jewish education in this country needs you. I trust that you will be able to come forward and help the Bureau of Education in its larger plans. The field that we can offer you is one that will involve the education of tens of thousands of our children. A man with your energy, heart and willingness will be able to render a great service to the cause of Jewish education in this country. This is not only my sentiment, but also that of Dr. Magnes and Dr. Friedlander who feel that a great task awaits you in the Jewish educational field.

Very truly yours,

S. BENDERLY.

It was the custom of the Board of Directors to hold its election of officers shortly after the annual meeting and they gathered for this purpose on March 7, 1914.

It is difficult to describe the tenseness of feeling which prevailed on this occasion so that the very atmosphere seemed to be electrically charged. Those few directors who had before been pronounced in their opposition to Mr. Fischel, were more than ever enraged by the realization that they constituted a small minority, and that the entire Jewish public was, in fact, solidly behind Mr. Fischel and gave its entire approval to the steps he had taken for the advancement of Jewish education.

Knowing they were beaten, these few men maintained, with added bitterness, their previous position.

The large majority, however, stood with Mr. Fischel and exerted every appeal and every pressure to cause him to reconsider his decision to resign and expressed their readiness to tender him an almost unanimous nomination for a fourth term as president.

Deeply appreciative of this confidence, Mr. Fischel might have reconsidered his decision were it not for the fact that his health had been seriously impaired as a result of the practically continuous concentration he had given to the affairs of the institution and the strain that had attended the long conflict of opinion with some of the directors, culminating in the excitement and turmoil

attending his resignation which had left him both physically worn out and mentally exhausted.

Proof of the great change which had taken place in the minds of most of the directors was further afforded by the selection of Mr. Henry Glass to succeed Mr. Fischel in the office of president. A business man of wide prominence, Mr. Glass was a firm believer in the policies Mr. Fischel had inaugurated and at once committed himself to a continuance of them, requesting Mr. Fischel to give him his support and counsel in executing the duties of his office, which Mr. Fischel promised to do as soon as his health was restored.

Under Mr. Glass' administration the work of the institution went forward without interruption along the same lines Mr. Fischel had laid down and it continued as a model in the field of Jewish education.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FIRST COMMERCIAL BUILDING ON UPPER BROADWAY

A BUSINESS enterprise that was to change the character of the improvements on Broadway in the upper Thirties and was to largely determine the future of this section of that famous thoroughfare in a commercial sense, engaged, quite accidentally, Mr. Fischel's attention while he was still president of the Uptown Talmud Torah.

During most of his incumbency of that office he had devoted himself exclusively to the interests of the institution, but in 1912, when it seemed desirable and necessary, he again turned his mind to his own affairs, particularly in view of the steady drain upon his financial resources. It was just at this time that the opportunity for the most important building operation on which he had yet been engaged was opened to him. He managed, by securing competent assistance, to take advantage of this opportunity without interfering with what he held to be his first responsibility, namely towards the institution of which he was the head.

He was approached by the brokerage firm of Horace S. Ely and Company with a proposition to lease a large plot of ground at the corner of Broadway and thirty-seventh street, which was owned by a Western client of theirs, a Mr. McCutcheon, who had had few, if any, business dealings with Jewish people.

This man on, being introduced to Mr. Fischel, took him in from head to foot, and it was quite clear from the expression on his face, that he preferred not to have anything to do with him. Mr. Fischel suggested that it might be well if Mr. McCutcheon obtain some references as to his financial and personal standing before proceeding to business and among many other names suggested

that he might make inquiries of Mr. Jacob H. Schiff and Mr. Adolph Lewisohn.

Mr. Fischel suggested that, should the references obtained from these gentlemen be satisfactory, another meeting could be arranged at which the matter of the lease might be more fully discussed.

A few days later, Mr. Fischel was advised by the brokers that Mr. McCutcheon was ready to talk business and at this meeting the latter's demeanor, had completely changed. Mr. McCutcheon declared that the references he had received were more than satisfactory and that he was quite ready to proceed to the affair in hand. In a very short time after this conference, the transaction was closed to the satisfaction of both parties.

At this time, the neighborhood of Broadway and Thirty-seventh Street constituted the heart of the theatre district and Mr. Fischel prepared plans for a theatre with offices on the upper floors which promised to prove a profitable undertaking. It so happened, however, that his plans underwent a change.

In connection with his many communal activities, Mr. Fischel had, as a matter of course, formed acquaintances and friendships with a large number of prominent men in all walks of life and in virtually every business, whose confidence and respect he had gained. Many of these men regarded Mr. Fischel's financial responsibility as even greater than it was, for they judged his means by the large sums of money he contributed to philanthropic causes and by the fact that he gave virtually all of his time to these activities.

It was such an indirect benefit as resulted from these contacts which caused Mr. Fischel to change his mind regarding the construction of a theatre on the Broadway site. While attending a directors' meeting of the Beth Israel Hospital, with which many prominent merchants were connected, he was approached by four men who had learned of the transaction and who persuaded him to abandon the theatre project and to erect on the property a strictly mercantile building instead.

The proposal was very tempting and practically insured the

success of the undertaking, as Mr. Reuben Sadowsky agreed to lease five floors of the projected building, Blauner Brothers, two floors, Zelenko and Moskowitz, two floors and David Harris, one floor.

Aside from the financial aspects of the undertaking, this venture appealed strongly to Mr. Fischel because it once again permitted him to be a pioneer, as this was the first large mercantile building to be erected on that part of Broadway, which today is a center of both retail and wholesale trade.

When Mr. Fischel was ready to proceed with this large building operation he decided to secure an associate whom he might entrust with actual supervision of the work, in order that his time might not be too largely taken away from the Talmud Torah. His choice fell upon Mr. Joseph Ravitch. Mr. Ravitch not only ably carried out this trust but has ever since that time remained as Mr. Fischel's associate, enabling the latter to continue to devote a major portion of his own labors to the community.

The enterprise was in every way successful and Mr. Fischel's business foresight and acumen were vindicated anew by the fact that, within a short time, this neighborhood was transformed into its present importance as one of the most active business sections of the city. A few years after completion of the structure, Mr. Fischel sold it at a handsome margin of profit to Mr. Sadowsky.

## CHAPTER XX

### HELPS FORM RELIGIOUS PROGRAMME FOR Y. M. H. A.

THE programme Mr. Fischel had carried out while President of the Uptown Talmud Torah and which had led to his difficulties with some of the directors, had in no sense lessened his influence in the field of Jewish education but had, as a matter of fact, served to strengthen his position not only with the public but with the important Jewish leaders who had closely followed the progress he had made.

The Talmud Torah, which was also known as the Harlem Jewish Institute, during his regime as President became much more than merely a school for religious instruction. The building was also in reality a Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, with all the many physical and social facilities to be expected in such an institution.

These included a number of well appointed club rooms, lectures on a wide variety of subjects of general interest and a finely equipped gymnasium, with a trained physical instructor in attendance. Mr. Fischel placed a great deal of importance upon the physical training of the children and was instrumental in having adopted a system of regular calisthenics.

His interest in this work was so well known and his experience regarded as so valuable that at the time of the formation of the Council of Young Men's Hebrew and Kindred Associations, Mr. Fischel was very naturally asked to serve as one of fifteen members of the Board of Managers, the New York members of which were comprised of the heads of the Young Men's Hebrew Associations of the Metropolitan District, with Judge Irving Lehman as president.

So it was that once more Mr. Fischel was to be given the opportunity of impressing his ideas of what constituted proper

conduct of Jewish institutions for the young upon the conscience of the community. He again insisted upon adherence to a religious programme in the administration of the Y.M.H.A.'s although, as seemed invariably the rule when this subject was broached, he at first met with considerable opposition.

On April 7, 1914, Mr. Fischel received from Mr. Felix M. Warburg the following invitation to attend a dinner of the charter members of the Council to be held at his residence:

Mr. Harry Fischel,  
World Building,  
Manhattan.

April 7th, 1914.

Dear Mr. Fischel:

Inasmuch as the bills for the incorporation of the Council and of the Trustees of the Council of Young Men's Hebrew and Kindred Associations, have through the kind efforts of Mr. Marshall, been signed by the Governor, and we are now incorporated, it is important that we officially take cognizance of our duties and hold a meeting for the purpose of accepting the respective acts of incorporation (hereafter to be known as Chapters 74 and 75 of the Laws of 1914) and of organizing and adopting a constitution and by-laws.

You are therefore cordially invited to attend a dinner and meeting at my home, 1109 Fifth Avenue, on Wednesday evening, April 22nd, at eight o'clock.

Sincerely yours,

FELIX M. WARBURG

Secretary, Board of Managers,  
Council of Y.M.H. & Kindred Ass'ns.

At this dinner, held in Mr. Warburg's residence, the following fifteen charter members of the Board of Managers were present: I. W. Bernheim, Louisville, Kentucky; Alfred M. Cohen, Cincinnati, Ohio; David A. Ellis, Boston, Massachusetts; Harry Fischel, New York; Judge Samuel Greenbaum, first vice president, New York; Isaac Hassler, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;

Judge Irving Lehman, treasurer, New York; Jacob M. Loeb, Chicago, Illinois; Judge Julian W. Mack, president, Chicago; Louis Marshall, New York; Jacob Newman, second vice-president, New Orleans, Louisiana; M. C. Sloss, San Francisco, California; Mrs. Israel Unterberg, New York; A. Leo Weil, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Felix M. Warburg, Secretary, New York.

Following the reading by Mr. Warburg of the charter, which outlined the general plan of activities to be inaugurated in all Young Men's Hebrew and Kindred Associations, Mr. Fischel embraced the opportunity to make the same plea he had made years before in relation to the conduct of the orphan asylums, namely that the Young Men's Hebrew Associations must be conducted in accordance with the traditional principles of the Jewish faith.

Otherwise, and if physical and social activities were to be the only benefits derived at a Y.M.H.A. there was no necessity of separate institutions for the Jewish youth, he asserted. They might just as well be members of the Young Men's Christian Association or other similar organizations.

Louis Marshall immediately supported Mr. Fischel in his demand that religion be introduced into the work of the institutions, insisting that it should not only be a part of the programme to be adopted but should form a considerable part of such programme.

As a result of his plea, seconded so eloquently by Mr. Marshall, Mr. Fischel was appointed chairman of a Religious Committee and was entrusted with the task of helping to prepare a suitable plan whereby the associations' activities should combine consideration of the spiritual with the physical needs of those who should come to them.

When, in later years, the Council of Y.M.H.A. and Kindred Associations was merged with the Jewish Welfare Board Mr. Fischel continued to serve as a member of the Board and still does.

## CHAPTER XXI

### JEWRY'S WORLD CALL IN THE GREAT WAR

THE outbreak of the Great War in 1914, coming with cataclysmic suddenness and fury upon the world, was destined to impose hitherto unprecedented obligations and burdens upon American Jewish philanthropy and, for the next ten years, to occupy a very large place in the attention and activities of Jewish leaders.

At the commencement of the titanic struggle, even after all the great powers except the United States, were involved, few persons either in Europe or America anticipated that the conflict, because of its very hugeness, could be of long duration. While, from bitter experience, it was appreciated that the Jews must suffer most from a war in which all of Europe was embroiled, it was not for some months that any organized effort was made to meet the situation which was inevitable.

Even at the outset of the war, however, business in Europe came to a complete standstill and the Jews, largely engaged in small trade or artisans and mechanics and with few exceptions having investments from which they derived an income, found themselves placed in a critical situation. For a few weeks they were enabled to live upon their small savings or to borrow from those more fortunately situated, but the Jewish institutions, the Yeshivas, Talmud Torahs and the charitable organizations generally, at once felt the effects of the changed economic conditions.

The people, themselves, their employment endangered or cut off, their business forced to suspend, had first to care for their own needs and were unable to continue to give support to their institutions. These, faced with the danger of being compelled to close or else to greatly limit their activities, had no recourse but to appeal to their brethren in America, the only country thus far not drawn into the war.

But even these first appeals which reached America did not begin to convey a true picture of the situation as it affected millions of Jews throughout Europe whose sufferings were already becoming intense and whose institutions and traditions were threatened with extinction if help were not extended them.

It is, therefore, a notable historic fact that the first steps taken to meet the situation were at the instance of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America which, on September 28, 1914, addressed a telegram to its constituent congregations setting forth the needs and calling a conference of prominent Orthodox Jews to consider them.

This conference, held on October 1, 1914 at the residence of the late Rev. Dr. Philip Klein, Rabbi of the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek, resulted in the decision to form a relief committee, with the primary purpose of extending assistance to the Jewish institutions of Europe and Palestine, but which later came to embody the scope of individual aid as well.

This committee was organized on October 4, 1914 at the office of the Jewish Daily News, under the name of the Central Committee for the Relief of Jews Suffering through the War and the following officers were chosen: Leon Kamaiky, chairman; Harry Fischel, Treasurer; the late Albert Lucas and Morris Engelman, Secretaries.

Shortly after this another historic event took place when the Central Committee issued the first formal appeal to be made to the Jews of America in behalf of their suffering co-religionists abroad, an appeal which was the forerunner of countless others to be issued during the ensuing years and by which millions of dollars were raised and successfully distributed.

This appeal, which constitutes a document of extraordinary interest and significance to Jewry the world over, was as follows:

FIRST CALL OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
FOR THE RELIEF OF  
JEWS SUFFERING THROUGH THE WAR

TO THE JEWS OF AMERICA:

Our brethren are dying. Widows and orphans are wandering homeless, naked and hungry. Women, old and young, with their little ones and the aged find no refuge. In every land that we or our fathers once called home, bloody war with all its unspeakable horrors stalks abroad. Thousands of villages have been ravaged and great cities laid waste. Mourning, they lift up their eyes. Whence shall come their help!

More than half of the Jews of the world are overwhelmed in the present conflict. The condition of our brethren in Palestine, also, is past description. Its institutions can no longer be supported by the generosity of our brethren in Europe, as today the Jews of Europe are themselves sore beset.

Another most serious condition brought about by the war must not be overlooked. Thousands among us have regularly sent money to our families and friends "at home" to help our less fortunate kinsmen.

All the world is looking to us for aid and direction. We will surely not be deaf to their prayers.

We have therefore formed in New York a committee of representative rabbis and laymen to help our co-religionists in Europe and Palestine.

This committee is extending its organization throughout the United States and appeals to you to join it. It asks you either to call a meeting in your synagogue, or to join with others to call a meeting in your city, at which contributions shall be collected, local officers elected and representatives chosen to be added to our Central Committee in New York. We want at least two representatives in each city of the United States to be in constant communication with us in order to organize the Jews of America into one compact body, ready and willing to raise a large

RELIEF FUND FOR JEWS SUFFERING THROUGH  
THE WAR.

REMEMBER—This war has ruined hundreds of thousands of our brethren.

REMEMBER—No one can tell, today, whether his own relatives are not refugees far from their own home.

REMEMBER—That the assistance of this Committee may save the lives of those who are near and dear to you. You cannot know where your own father or mother, sister or brother is. Your help through us, may help them.

AND REMEMBER—that this war will cause an amount of suffering unprecedented in history. Ways and means must be devised to raise an enormous amount of money at once, and to continue the effort throughout the weeks and months, aye, possibly even through the next few years to come.

This Committee is preparing plans which will enable every one to help daily, weekly and monthly, without taxing the resources of anyone beyond his means.

Join us at once. Send in your names and the names of those associated with you to the secretary of the committee. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the Agudas Harabonim, the Mizrachi and the Central Committee of Palestine Institutions are all represented on this committee. A large number of collections have already been made in response to their appeals. All amounts should be remitted as soon as possible to the financial secretary of this committee; and checks drawn made payable to the order of the treasurer.

Five thousand dollars has been sent to a committee of Palestinian Jews comprising Guedalia N. Broder, Isaac Chagis, Joseph Eliaschar, Behr Epstein, Saul Isaac Freund, Dr. Isaac Levy, Solomon Perlman, Alter Rivlin, Dr. Arthur Ruppin, Solomon Rubin, Wolf Schechter, Salmon Soloweitchik, Aaron Vallero, David Yellin.

Five thousand dollars has been sent to the Israelitische Alliance, Vienna, for the relief of Galician Jews and one thousand dollars for the Yeshibath.

In securing the services of Mr. Harry Fischel as Treasurer, the Committee has obtained the advantage of his wide acquaintance throughout the United States. All moneys received by him are deposited in the Guaranty Trust Company of America. Arrangements will be made through the accredited representatives of the U. S. Government to forward money to our stricken brethren.

ren as soon as we can get in touch with responsible people in all the war zones who will distribute it without favor for the immediate relief of the Jewish widows and orphans, sick and wounded, aged and infirm; in short, to all those who will die of hunger and cold, unless you promptly help.

LEON KAMAIKY, *Chairman*  
 HARRY FISCHER, *Treasurer*  
 World Bldg., 63 Park Row, New York.  
 J. J. BERNSTEIN, *Recording Secretary*  
 MORRIS ENGELMAN, *Financial Secretary*.  
 ALBERT LUCAS, *Corresponding Secretary*.

It is the intention of this Committee to cooperate with the Committee of 100, as soon as it is formed.

#### COMMITTEE

Rabbi M. S. Margolies, President, Agudas Harabonim, Rabbi Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun.

Rabbi Wolf Margolies, Adath Israel.

Rabbi Philip Klein, President, Mizrachi. Congregation Ohab Zedek.

Rabbi Solomon E. Jaffe, Congregation Beth Hamedrash Hagadol.

Rabbi J. H. Leventhal, Agudas Harabonim (Philadelphia).

Rev. Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, Spanish and Portuguese Congregation.

Rev. Dr. Bernard Drachman, President, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Congregation Ohab Zedek.

Rev. Dr. Moses Hyamson, Congregation Orach Chaim.

Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun.

Rabbi Benj. B. Guth, Congregation Chassam Sofer.

Rabbi Samuel Glick, Secretary Agudas Harabonim.

Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, Agudas Harabonim (Paterson, N. J.)

Rabbi M. Peikes.

Rev. Harris Masliansky.

Rev. Phillip Jaches.

Mr. Bernard Bernstein

Mr. David Blutreich

Mr. Louis Borgénicht

Mr. Geudalia Bubelik

Mr. Moses Davis

Mr. Julius J. Dukas

Mr. E. W. Lewin Epstein	Mr. Morris Neuman
Mr. William Fischman	Mr. Moses H. Phillips
Mr. Aaron Garfunkel	Hon. N. Taylor Phillips
Mr. Henry Glass	Mr. Nathan Roggen
Mr. Jacob Hecht	Mr. J. Rokeach
Mr. Albert Herskowitz	Mr. Nathan Rosenzweig
Mr. Samuel I. Hyman	Mr. G. S. Roth
Mr. Nathan Hutkoff	Mr. Jacob Rubin
Mr. Lewis J. Kapit	Hon. Leon Sanders
Mr. David Kass	Mr. Ezekiel Sarasohn
Mr. Edwin I. Kaufman	Mr. Bernard Semel
Mr. Arnold Kohn	Dr. P. A. Siegelstein
Mr. Nathan Lamport	Mr. Elias Surut
Mr. Samuel Mason	Mr. Leon Tuchman
Mr. Max Meyerson	Mr. Jonas Weil
Mr. P. A. Wiernik	

Make Checks payable to HARRY FISCHEL, Treasurer, and mail to

CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR THE RELIEF  
OF JEWS SUFFERING THROUGH THE WAR  
1103 World Building, New York.

Upon Mr. Fischel's shoulders fell the task of receiving the moneys that were to come in response to this appeal and in order to save expense he volunteered to have the Committee's campaign conducted from his offices in the World Building at 61 Park Row where contributors were asked to send their donations to him as Treasurer.

No sooner had the appeal been issued through the newspapers of the country than checks began to pour in, in a very torrent. The appeal had struck a responsive chord in the heart of American Jewry and even in the first mail to be received after the publication of the Committee's letter thousands of checks in small amounts reached Mr. Fischel's office, so that he and his limited office force, totally unprepared for any such response, found themselves unable to cope with the situation.

It was still the general opinion, however, that the war would be of but a few weeks longer duration at most and it was deemed inadvisable under the circumstances to introduce elaborate machinery to handle the remittances, with all the cost of clerks and bookkeepers this would involve. For the next two weeks, therefore, Mr. Fischel, working night and day with his assistants, endeavored to keep up with the flood of checks that continued to arrive with every mail.

As reports of conditions in Europe continued to grow steadily worse and it became apparent the need was not to be so short lived as had been hoped, Mr. Fischel finally engaged an accountant and a number of bookkeepers and installed a card system by which every contribution was tabulated.

The system devised by Mr. Fischel called for the alphabetical tabulation by name, city and state of every contributor, so that it was possible to determine at a glance what any individual in a given community had given to the relief fund. This system proved a model not only for the needs of the Central Relief Committee but for many others, Jewish and Gentile, that were later formed.

Shortly after the system was installed, an official of the government who was ordered to look into the work the various relief organizations were doing, examined the Central Committee's accounts and on completing his examination issued a statement to the press in which, among other things, he stated:

"If all relief committees would do the same work in the same manner, with the same system as the Central Committee for the Relief of Jews Suffering Through the War, a great deal of money and effort could be saved, which could be used for the benefit of war sufferers."

Some idea of the magnitude of the work of the Central Committee may be gained from the fact that there passed through Mr. Fischel's hands as Treasurer the enormous sum of more than \$20,000,000 received in amounts ranging from five cents to \$10,000.

In these early days of the Committee the number of subscribers

mounted into the thousands but the individual contributions were comparatively small and the total sum did not begin to meet the constantly growing need. The first plan put into operation by the Committee was to forward the money, after a certain total was collected, to the cities then most largely affected by the war and where it was apportioned among the institutions, Yeshivas and Talmud Torahs, according to their needs.

It was not long, however, before a still greater call for assistance reached over the seas to America. The war had not stopped, as was anticipated. Instead it was daily reaching over a wider area and thousands of individuals in every land had been deprived of their homes, and had been made refugees without food or clothing. In the number were the aged and infirm, women and children, many of the latter rendered orphans.

The Jewish people of Europe would perish, would be blotted out of existence unless much greater aid from America was forthcoming at once. The situation, at first but little understood or realized, had by now, less than a month after the work was started by the Central Committee, come to be partially appreciated by the Jewish leaders of America, with the result that it was determined to make an effort to reach the wealthier class of Jews to whom the Central Committee's appeal had not directly been made.

In accordance with this determination, Mr. Louis Marshall, President of the American Jewish Committee, on October 24, 1914, issued a call for a conference at the Temple Emanue-El for the purpose of organizing a larger committee whose object it should be to reach all the Jews throughout the United States and bring home to them the dire plight of their brethren in Europe.

At this meeting it was decided to appoint a Committee of Five, whose duty it should be to select a national committee of One Hundred to comprise the American Jewish Relief Committee.

On this Committee of Five were named United States Supreme Court Justice Louis B. Brandeis, the late Congressman Meyer London, Judge Julian W. Mack, the late Secretary of Commerce, Oscar S. Straus and Mr. Fischel.

Little time was lost by the Committee of Five, in getting down to the task of selecting one hundred men from among the most prominent and representative Jews in America to comprise the American Jewish Relief Committee. Within a very few days after the meeting called at Temple Emanu-El, Justice Brandeis, as chairman, summoned the members to meet at the Bar Association Building on West Forty-fourth Street, New York City.

Practically the entire night was spent in carefully going over the names of leading Jews throughout the United States with the purpose of selecting not only the most prominent but those most likely to take effective leadership in this great cause.

On November 15, or as soon after this meeting as it was practicable to get them together from distant points, the Committee of One Hundred, representing as many national Jewish organizations, was formally summoned to meet at the offices of the United Hebrew Charities, now the Jewish Social Service, with the object of completing its organization, electing officers and selecting an Executive Committee of twenty-five, upon whom the chief burdens of the actual work were to be imposed. Louis Marshall was chosen chairman, Felix M. Warburg, treasurer and A. H. Fromenson, secretary.

A week after this meeting, Mr. Fischel received the following letter from Chairman Marshall, notifying him of his appointment to the Executive Committee.

PIONEERS IN THE RAISING OF FUNDS FOR THE  
RELIEF OF JEWS SUFFERING THROUGH THE WAR



MEMBERS OF THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE  
For the Relief of Jews Suffering Through the War,  
of which Mr. Fischel was One of the Founders.



Mr. Harry Fischel,  
61 Park Row,  
New York City.

Dear Sir:

I beg to inform you that at the meeting of the Committee of One Hundred, you were elected a member of the Executive Committee of Twenty-Five and I have called a meeting of the said Executive Committee for Tuesday evening, November 24th, at 8 o'clock at the United Hebrew Charities Building, 358 Second Avenue and another meeting to be held at the same address on Sunday morning, November 29th at 10:30 o'clock. Since you have been one of the five who have organized the American Jewish Relief Committee, your presence at these meetings is of the utmost importance.

Very sincerely yours,

LOUIS MARSHALL

## CHAPTER XXII

### WEDDING OF HIS FIRST DAUGHTER

BETWEEN the dates of these two meetings of the Executive Committee, November 24th and November 29th, 1914, a momentous event in Mr. Fischel's life, on its personal side, took place. This was the marriage of his eldest daughter, Sadie, to Mr. David Kass by Rabbi M. S. Margolies and the editor of this work, marking the realization of Mr. Fischel's hope to see his first daughter happily married to a worthy man who should live up to the ideals of religion and charity which he held and which he had imparted to his children. So well has Mr. Kass realized these ideals, that he has recently been elected President of the Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, and is the youngest man ever to have held that office in one of the foremost Orthodox Synagogues in the United States, numbering among its members and trustees leaders in every communal endeavor, religious and charitable.

As for Sadie Fischel Kass, she is walking directly in the footsteps of her father, and Mr. Fischel points with justifiable pride to a partial list of her communal activities as follows:— She has been Recording Secretary of the Women's Auxiliary of the Central Jewish Institute since its organization ten years ago. She is Treasurer of the Jewish Students' House on the Columbia Campus. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the National Women's League and has been Treasurer of the Women's League, New York City Branch, since its inception and is a directress of the Home of the Daughters of Jacob. With an inherited tendency to build, directly communicated to her from her father, she had been instrumental in the erection of two synagogues. One is the Welfare Island Synagogue, erected under the auspices of the Council of Jewish Women, of which she is Corresponding Secretary of the Welfare Island Synagogue Committee, and the other, now in process of construction, is the Jerusalem Synagogue and Center of which Mrs. Kass is Honorary National Treasurer.



MR. FISCHEL'S FIRST SON-IN-LAW,  
*Mr. and Mrs. David Kass and their children.*



## CHAPTER XXIII

### ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN JEWISH RELIEF COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the Executive Committee of Twenty-five of the American Jewish Relief Committee, attended by Mr. Fischel on November 29, it was decided to issue a general appeal for large contributions, the purpose being to concentrate the attention of American Jewry as a whole upon the pressing necessities of the situation confronting European Jewry and the Jews in Palestine, as a result of the great war which was being waged with ever increasing bitterness.

This first appeal of the American Jewish Relief Committee is herewith reproduced:

#### FIRST AMERICAN JEWISH RELIEF COMMITTEE APPEAL

The American Jewish Relief Committee, called into being at a conference of over 100 National Jewish organizations, which was held at Temple Emanu-El, New York City, on October 25th to consider the plight of over six million Jews who live within the war zone, has issued the following appeal:

The American Jewish Relief Committee for Sufferers from the War appeals to you to aid, with the utmost generosity and self-sacrifice, the fund now being gathered to provide relief for the families of the Jewish people in various parts of Europe and Asia who have been deprived of their means of sustenance either through the killing or wounding of their breadwinners, through the destruction of the towns in which they live, or through the resulting economic distress.

Our co-religionists, in common with their fellow-citizens of other creeds, are contributing with their usual liberality to the

several national and international relief funds. Neither these contributions nor those for local charities should be lessened by reason of the necessity which impels us to make this SPECIAL APPEAL to their generosity.

The disaster, in which the whole world shares, falls with disproportionate weight upon the Jewish people, more than nine millions of whom live in the countries at war, and over six million of those in the actual war zones in Poland, Galicia and the whole European frontier. Throughout this section the horrors of war and the devastation due to conflict have come upon a population already so oppressed and impoverished by persecution as to leave no reserve for this new calamity. Hunger, disease, destitution in its extremest form confront a Jewish population as numerous as the population of Belgium.

These exceptional circumstances have impelled the formation of the American Jewish Relief Committee, with a view of uniting all sections of Jewry in the United States in this supreme effort in the greatest crisis that has faced the Jewish people in modern times. Representatives from all parts of the United States and of every shade of opinion have participated in the deliberations which brought about the formation of this Committee, in the hope that united, concerted action would produce the most effective results.

In Poland and Galicia, where great contending armies are now engaged, it would not be so wise to entrust a committee or people who have instituted a religious and racial boycott against Jews with the duty of aiding or distributing funds among the large Jewish population in those countries. The sad conditions in Russia are well-known. Palestine, whose main source of subsistence is cut off and whose economic life has been paralyzed, is likewise in urgent need.

In view of these conditions and the exceptional severity of the conditions, we appeal to the Jews of America to come without stint to the rescue of their afflicted brethren. It is the purpose of this Committee, should it be found that no other relief funds are available in those districts, that this fund shall be applied to the relief of the most urgent distress, without regard to race or creed.

At the time of the Russian Pogroms the Jews of this country contributed nearly \$1,500,000 for the relief of the victims. The



A SESSION OF THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE.



present calamity is vastly greater and requires accordingly greater measures of relief.

In cities which have already established associate relief committees we ask you to make your donations and pledges to your local treasurer, or, if you are a member of a national organization acting in co-operation with this Committee, to the treasurer of your organization or to send your check and pledges direct to the treasurer of the American Jewish Relief Committee, Felix M. Warburg, 52 William Street, New York City.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH RELIEF COMMITTEE

BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Cyrus Adler, Philadelphia; Isaac Adler, Rochester; Louis D. Brandeis, Boston; Caeser Cope, Greensboro, N. C.; Samuel Dorf, New York; Harry Fischel, New York; J. Walter Freiberg, Cincinnati; Harry Friedenwald, Baltimore; Moses Gries, Cleveland; Louis E. Kirstein, Boston; Abr. G. Becker, Chicago; E. W. Lewin Epstein, New York; Meyer London, New York; Julian W. Mack, Chicago; J. L. Magnes, New York; M. S. Margolies, New York; Louis Marshall, New York; Leon Sanders, New York; Moses Schoenberg, St. Louis; Jacob H. Schiff, New York; Oscar S. Straus, New York; Mayer Sulzberger, Philadelphia; Cyrus L. Sulzberger, New York; Isaac N. Ullman, New Haven; Felix M. Warburg, New York; A. Leo Weil, Pittsburgh; Harris Weinstock, San Francisco.

As was to have been expected the response to this call, issued by the leading Jews of America, was both generous and enthusiastic. American Jewry was at last thoroughly aroused to the gravity of the situation and ready to exert itself to the utmost in its alleviation. Contributions in large amounts at once began to flow from every section of the country into the office of the treasurer, Felix M. Warburg, so that by late November a sufficient sum had been collected to make possible the holding of the first meeting of the Executive Committee to consider the problem of the distribution of the funds in hand.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE

#### *A Significant Chapter in Jewish History*

It soon became apparent to those engaged in war relief work that the problem of distribution was to be quite as important and equally as difficult as that of collecting funds, for there came from every part of Europe appeals from the stricken Jewish population, one more tragic and heart rending than another. It was therefore essential that such sums as were collected should not only be used in those places where they were most needed but for those particular objects that would accomplish most in relieving the acutest forms of distress.

Accordingly, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Relief Committee held late in November, it was decided to keep separate and distinct the work of collection and distribution and at about this time there came into being the Joint Distribution Committee of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers, with Felix M. Warburg as chairman, which was organized as the result of the initiative of the American Jewish Relief Committee and the Central Committee for the Relief of Jews Suffering through the War, of which Mr. Fischel was treasurer.

Immediately after this meeting, Mr. Fischel was appointed as a member of the Executive Committee of the Joint Distribution Committee, which, during the war and subsequent to the Armistice, distributed nearly \$100,000,000 of relief moneys collected through its subsidiary committees, the American, Central and People's Relief Committees, continuing its activities down to the present time.

The letter notifying Mr. Fischel of his appointment as a member of this Committee was as follows:

Mr. Harry Fischel,  
61 Park Row,  
New York City.

November 25, 1914.

Dear Sir:

The executive committee of the American Jewish Relief Committee has appointed you a member of its committee on distribution, of which Mr. Felix M. Warburg is Chairman. Since you are the Treasurer of the Central Relief Committee, it is of the utmost importance for you to accept this designation. A meeting of this committee will be called shortly by the Chairman.

Very truly yours,

A. H. FROMENSON

*Secretary of the Executive Committee.*

The first meeting of this committee, organized for distribution of the vast sums collected and to be collected for the aid of the suffering Jewish populations of Europe and Palestine, marked an epoch in the history of American Jewry as it was the first time that every section of Jewry, the Orthodox and Reform elements, as well as the element represented by the workers through their labor unions, was to be united for the fulfillment of a common purpose.

At the meetings of the Joint Distribution Committee were gathered round a single council table, the rich and the poor, the aristocrat and the middle class, the banker and the toiler, the professional man and scholar, all with the single object in view of securing a maximum of efficiency and a maximum amount of good from the disbursement of the moneys collected from the public for relief.

It is unnecessary at this time to record exactly how much and to what places the first funds were distributed but it is a matter of historic record and a cause for pride on the part of Mr. Fischel that the first money to reach Europe from America came from the Central Relief Committee, the first of the relief organizations

to be formed and through whose instrumentality many Jewish institutions were saved from destruction.

The Central Committee collected its funds chiefly through appeals made in the Orthodox synagogues and from Orthodox Jewish institutions, lodges and societies and its money was used principally for direct aid to the institutions, Talmud Torahs and Yeshivas in Europe and Palestine.

The American Committee sought its funds for general relief from the wealthier class of Jews throughout the United States, while the contributions to the Peoples' Committee, the last to be organized, came from the working classes through the unions.

Each committee conducted its own separate campaigns but but the funds of all were turned over to the Joint Distribution Committee, comprised of the leading members of the three committees, whose sole task it was to designate the amounts to be sent to the several parts of Europe and the purpose for which they were to be expended. Later on and following the Armistice the Joint Distribution Committee had its own representatives scattered throughout Europe for the purpose of making recommendations direct to the New York headquarters.

Despite the fact that the American and Central committees were functioning and were putting forth every effort to collect as large amounts as possible, the demand for aid from the sufferers in the constantly widening war zones, with their scenes of indescribable devastation, continued to grow and to far exceed the total of the contributions to date. It was, furthermore, by this time, late in 1914, clearly apparent that the end of the war was not in sight and that the longer it should last the greater would be the calls upon American Jewry for aid.

Accordingly and to increase both the number and volume of contributions a meeting of all those engaged in war relief collections in every part of the country, was arranged to be held in Carnegie Hall, New York, on December 21. Prior to this meeting Mr. Jacob H. Schiff invited the members of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Relief Committee and the

speakers at this conference to be his guests at dinner, to which, on December 14, Mr. Fischel received the following invitation.

My dear Mr. Fischel:

I am inviting the speakers at the Carnegie Hall meeting next Tuesday to dine at my residence, 965 Fifth Avenue, at 7 o'clock to meet the executive committee and a few others. I shall be pleased if you will honor me with your company. We will proceed after dinner to Carnegie Hall in a body.

Respectfully yours,

JACOB H. SCHIFF

It is doubtful if ever before or since in the history of American Jewry such a scene has been witnessed as the demonstration that took place at this Carnegie Hall meeting. After hearing a description of the appalling conditions confronting the Jews of Europe and listening to the eloquent appeals made in their behalf by Jacob H. Schiff, Dr. Judah L. Magnes, Nathan Straus, the late Bishop David H. Greer of the Episcopal Church, Rabbi M. S. Margolies, the late Congressman Meyer London and the Rev. Dr. Leon Harrison of St. Louis, the audience responded in a manner that showed how deeply their hearts had been touched.

As the result of a collection made during the meeting more than \$700,000 was realized in cash, pledges and checks and many of the women in the audience took off their jewels and dropped them in the contribution baskets as their donation to the cause.

As the outcome of this meeting and the tremendous amount of attention it received from the press of the entire country contributions were for a while largely stimulated and the American Jewish Relief Committee received a number of individual donations that were the largest amounts to be given for a Jewish charitable cause ever recorded up to that time.

The Central Relief Committee, however, had a much more difficult task than that which confronted the American Committee, for its field, comprised of the Orthodox congregations and

the institutions and societies, was limited and already had been pretty thoroughly canvassed.

Following the Carnegie Hall meeting, Mr. Fischel again concentrated his attention on finding some way in which the Central Relief Committee might reach individual Orthodox Jews, who, while not able to give the large contributions the American Jewish Relief Committee was receiving, could afford to give sums in proportion to their means.

In order to reach every such home in the United States the Committee decided, in connection with its appeal, to issue certificates in sums ranging from \$5 to \$100 which should be given to contributors in these amounts. It was felt that people would give much more willingly and freely if they received some recognition of their gifts which might be preserved to posterity. This idea proved a good one and resulted in thousands of dollars in additional contributions being secured which might otherwise not have been donated.



MEETING OF THE DIRECTORS OF THE CENTRAL JEWISH  
RELIEF COMMITTEE

*For which Mr. Fischel as Treasurer Handled More  
Than Twenty Million Dollars.*



## CHAPTER XXV

### WEDDING OF HIS SECOND DAUGHTER

ANOTHER happy event occurred in Mr. Fischel's family on March 7, 1915, when his daughter Rebecca was married to Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein. The marriage ceremony was performed in the Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun, where the bridegroom was the Junior Rabbi, with the following noted Rabbis officiating: Rabbi M. S. Margolies, senior Rabbi of the Congregation; Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, President of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and the late Solomon Schechter, President of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The wedding dinner was held in Mr. Fischel's home. A souvenir of the occasion was given to the guests in the form of a book entitled "Praise for Righteousness," by Moses Haym Luzatto, translated by the bride and bridegroom. This marked the first Hebrew play to be translated into English. It is an Epithalameum (written by Luzatto in honor of his friend's wedding) which made it a most fitting memento of the marriage ceremony.

"Who's Who in American Jewry" for 1926 contains, among other references to Rabbi Goldstein, the following:

"Received B.A. and M.A. degrees from Columbia University; Smicha (Right to Decide Religious Questions) conferred by Rabbi S. E. Jaffe; graduate Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Founder and Rabbi Institutional Synagogue, New York City; Assistant Professor of Homiletics, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary; President Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America; Author of 'Comments on the Ethics of the Fathers,' 'Extracts from the Paths of Righteousness' (translation); compiler, 'Home Service Prayers'."

The same book of Jewish reference gives the following record of Mrs. Goldstein's chief activities:

"Received B.A. degree from Barnard College, Columbia University; graduate of Teachers' Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Member of Board, New York Section Council of Jewish Women; President Women's Branch Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and founder of the Union's Collegiate Branch; Vice Chairman Women's Committee Yeshiva College Dormitory Fund; Chairman Committee on Religion, Council of Jewish Women; directress, Home of Daughters of Jacob and Hebrew Day Nursery."

In 1917, Rabbi Goldstein, actuated by the purpose of broadening his activities in the direction of the religious training of the Jewish youth, founded the Institutional Synagogue. Mr. Fischel, in furtherance of the undertaking, purchased the institution's first building at 112 West 116th Street. This building formed the nucleus for the present structure of the Institutional Synagogue at 37-43 West 116th Street, constituting one of the largest and most important Orthodox Synagogues and Talmud Torahs in the country.

As was to have been expected of her, Mrs. Goldstein has been most active not only in aiding her husband in this work but in the work of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, of which she is the president of the Women's Branch. She also founded a Collegiate Branch of the Union which has spread the message of Orthodox Judaism among countless college students.



MR. FISHEL'S SECOND SON-IN-LAW  
*Rabbi and Mrs. Herbert S. Goldstein and their children.*



## CHAPTER XXVI

### PRESIDENT WILSON'S PROCLAMATION

#### IN AID OF THE WAR SUFFERERS

WITH all of the means that had thus far been used to stimulate contributions to the various Jewish war relief committees the sums collected still fell far short of the needs and Mr. Fischel spent a great deal of thought in trying to devise some method by which the attention of the entire country might be concentrated upon this cause.

Mr. Morris Engelman, the Financial Secretary of the Central Relief Committee, hit upon the idea that if the President of the United States could be interested in issuing a proclamation setting aside a certain day to be designated as Jewish War Relief Day, this would accomplish the purpose and would at one stroke acquaint the entire people of the country with the full gravity of the situation and result in a very large sum being collected on the day fixed.

Acting upon this idea, which was communicated to the other executives of the Central Relief Committee, an attempt was immediately made to find an individual who could best place the matter before the President and enlist his sympathy and cooperation. Upon inquiry it was learned that Senator Martine, of New Jersey, of which state President Woodrow Wilson had been governor, was the right man to approach and Mr. Fischel accordingly entered into correspondence with Senator Martine explaining the object it was sought to achieve. Senator Martine was at once interested and promised to do everything in his power to induce the President to issue such a proclamation as was suggested.

First, however, the Senator procured the passage of a resolution in the United States Senate calling attention to the pitiable

condition of the nine million Jews in the war zones and to their cry to America for aid. The resolution requested the President to take notice of the situation by designating a day on which the citizens of this country might give expression to their sympathy by contributing to the funds for relief of these Jewish war sufferers.

Finally, on January 11, 1916, the Committee was formally advised by Senator Martine that the President had acceded to its request and had set aside January 27, as Jewish War Relief Day, issuing a proclamation to that effect. This news was received with great joy and satisfaction by the members of the Central Relief Committee as it was felt that, more than any other single measure that had thus far been taken, this would focus the attention of all Americans on the tragic necessity which impelled such a nation-wide appeal for help.

The President's proclamation, issued on January 11, 1916, was as follows:

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF  
AMERICA—A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, I have received from the Senate of the United States a Resolution, passed January 6, 1916, reading as follows:

“WHEREAS, in the various countries now engaged in war there are nine millions of Jews, the great majority of whom are destitute of food, shelter and clothing; and

“WHEREAS, millions of them have been driven from their homes without warning, deprived of an opportunity to make provision for their most elementary wants, causing starvation, disease and untold suffering; and

“WHEREAS, the people of the United States of America have learned with sorrow of this terrible plight of millions of human beings and have most generously responded to the cry for help whenever such an appeal has reached them; Therefore be it

“RESOLVED, That, in view of this misery, wretchedness, and hardships which these nine millions of Jews are suffering, the President of the United States be respectfully asked to desig-

nate a day on which the citizens of this country may give expression to their sympathy by contributing to the funds now being raised for the relief of the Jews in the war zones."

AND WHEREAS, I feel confident that the people of the United States will be moved to aid the war-stricken people of a race which has given to the United States so many worthy citizens;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, in compliance with the suggestion of the Senate thereof, do appoint and proclaim January 27, 1916, as a day upon which the people of the United States may make such contribution as they feel disposed for the aid of the stricken Jewish people.

Contributions may be addressed to the American Red Cross, Washington, D. C., which will care for their proper distribution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

SEAL OF  
THE UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA

Done at the city of Washington this eleventh day of January, in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and sixteen, and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and fortieth.

WOODROW WILSON

By the President:

ROBERT LANSING

Secretary of State.

The original of President Wilson's proclamation was received by the Central Relief Committee on January 14 and steps were immediately taken by the Committee to insure the largest possible response to the President's message, \$3,000,000 being fixed as the smallest sum that should be contributed by American Jewry on the day set apart as Jewish Relief Day.

The Committee at once arranged for a lithographed certificate bearing an exact copy of the President's proclamation, with a beautiful illuminated border which, it was announced, would be issued with every contribution of from one dollar to one hundred dollars. Reproductions of these certificates, of which several

thousands were made ready, appeared in practically every daily newspaper in the United States, with the result that the demand for them was so large that it was difficult to meet it and the certificates brought a large sum of money into the Committee.

To make the facts relating to Jewish War Relief Day as widely known as possible the Committee also sought to bring about meetings to be held in every city on that day for the purpose of making collections and issued the following statement which appeared in the press of the country and was also sent to the Committee's branches:

#### TO THE JEWS OF AMERICA

The President of the United States has issued a special proclamation designating Thursday, January 27, as the day upon which every man, woman and child in America, without regard to race or creed, has been officially requested to assist the nine million Jews that are suffering unspeakable outrages—all the horrors of expulsion from their homes—starvation and nakedness, in all the lands that are now engaged in the war. Unlike the Belgians, the Armenians, the Serbians and other people who have a flag to which they can rally, our brethren are landless, and though they are fighting under every flag, no one of the nations for which they offer their life's blood offers them any protection as Jews. The greatest misfortune through which our people have lived is now presented to us.

The intention of the President is that Thursday, January 27, shall be a day that shall have historic importance for the Jews residing in this country. Every one, both Jew and those that are not of our faith, is requested by him to contribute to the fund. Surely such a request addressed by him to the citizens of the United States, without regard to race or creed, should have a special significance to us, we the brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of the nine million Jews that are suffering in the war zones.

It must be remembered that the resolution passed by the Senate, through which the President issued this proclamation, was introduced by Senator Martine at the urgent request of Mr. Harry Fischel, treasurer of the Central Jewish Relief Committee.

It, therefore, becomes the bounden duty of every Jew to do all in his power, both in honor of the President of the United States and in honor of his own race and creed. It is surely not too much to ask from the three million Jews in America that on the Jewish Relief Day proclaimed by the President of the United States there shall be collected from the Jews alone a sum equal to at least one dollar per head, that is to say, it is the earnest wish of the Central Jewish Relief Committee that the Jews of the United States shall respond to the President's proclamation by contributing on the 27th of January at least \$3,000,000. Doubtless many among us can give much more than one dollar. But in asking the Jews to contribute \$3,000,000 for the Jewish Relief Fund to be collected on the special Jewish Relief Day, it must be remembered that a number of children and a large number of poor, will not be able to contribute at all. It is, therefore, the duty of all those whom fortune has favored, to contribute to the very best of his ability and as large a sum as possible, to make up for those who will not be able to contribute anything at all.

The Central Committee has prepared a copy of the President's proclamation and is also issuing certificates representing contributions of \$1, \$5, \$10, \$25, \$50 and \$100. One copy of the President's proclamation will be issued with each certificate.

Doubtless many of those who are not of our faith will also be willing to purchase one of these historic documents and all that we now need to do is to prepare for the Great Day. Every one who is able should volunteer to place his or her services at the disposal of the local Branch of the Central Committee or of some other representative Jewish body in every village, town and city in the country. Every rabbi should feel it his duty to preach a special sermon on Sabbath, January 22. Doubtless many Christian ministers will also take advantage of the following Sunday to appeal to their congregations. Meetings should be organized and every effort should at once be made. Let us hear from you at once telling us how many certificates we may send you and of what denominations. Checks should be made payable to the order of Mr. Harry Fischel, Treasurer.

There will be a large meeting in every city of the United States on the Jewish Relief Day, January 27. Everything must be done in advance so that everything shall be in order. Work

must go on smoothly, punctually in every city and town of the United States.

The sooner you send us your orders the sooner we shall be able to fill them. All committees are requested from now until midnight of January 27th to telegraph to this office, the details of the work they are doing. Let us know what mass meetings they have arranged and the amounts which have so far been collected and what pledges are already in hand.

The effect of the President's Proclamation and the interest aroused by the Jewish Relief Day was immediate and far reaching, so that the campaign to raise hitherto unheard of sums for a Jewish charitable purpose was given new life and branch committees were formed in every town in the country where even a few Jews had their residence.

At a meeting of the Central Committee held just after the National Jewish Relief Day, Mr. Fischel proposed that a suitable resolution of appreciation be prepared by the Committee and presented to the President.

This suggestion was unanimously passed and such a form of appreciation was engrossed on heavy parchment, bound in book form and, accompanied with a copy of the certificate issued by the Committee in connection with the President's Proclamation, was presented to the

HONORABLE WOODROW WILSON

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*In Recognition of his Humanitarian Act in Proclaiming*

THE JEWISH RELIEF DAY

JANUARY TWENTY-SEVENTH, 1916

CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR THE RELIEF OF JEWS  
SUFFERING THROUGH THE WAR

HARRY FISCHEL, *Treasurer*  
LEON KAMAIKY, *Chairman*  
ALBERT LUCAS, *Executive Secretary*  
RABBI I. ROSENBERG, *Vice Chairman*  
MORRIS ENGELMAN, *Financial Secretary*  
RABBI MEYER BERLIN, *Vice Chairman*

COMMITTEE

Bernard Bernstein	Wolf Klebansky
John L. Bernstein	Rabbi Philip Klein
Stanley Bero	Rabbi Joseph Konvitz
N. H. Borenstein	Nathan Lamport
Louis Borgenicht	Rabbi B. L. Leventhal
Guedalia Bublik	Rabbi M. S. Margolies
Moses Davis	Rev. Harris Masliansky
Rev. Dr. Bernard Drachman	Samuel Mason
Julius J. Dukas	Rev. Dr. H. Pereira Mendes
C. Joshua Epstein	Rev. H. S. Morais
E. W. Lewin-Epstein	Samuel W. Moskowitz
William Fischman	Moritz Neuman
Louis Friedman	Rabbi M. Peikus
Aaron Garfunkel	Moses H. Phillips
Jacob Ginsburg	Hon. N. Taylor Phillips
Henry Glass	Nathan Roggen
Rabbi Samuel Glick	J. Rokeach
Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein	Abraham Rosen
Mendel Gottesman	Nathan Rosensweig
Rabbi Benj. B. Guth	G. S. Roth
Isidore Herschfield	Ignatz Roth
Albert Herskovitz	Jacob Rubin
Joseph Horwitz	Hon. Leon Sanders
Nathan Hutkoff	Ezekiel Sarasohn
Rev. Dr. Moses Hyamson	Rabbi J. Seigel
Samuel I. Hyman	Hon. Isaac Siegel
Rev. Phillip Jaches	Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum
Louis I. Kapit	Leon Tuchmann
David Kass	Jonas Weil
Edwin Kaufman	Peter Wiernik

## WOMEN'S PROCLAMATION DAY COMMITTEE

MRS. SAMUEL ELKELES, *Chairman*

MRS. HENRY KRAFT, *Treasurer*

MRS. DAVID KASS

MRS. EMANUEL ELZAS

MRS. L. W. ZWISSOHN

MISS SARA X. SCHOTTENFELS

*Honorary Secretaries*

Mrs. Joseph Mayor Asher	Mrs. Samuel Frankelstein
Mrs. Albert Canfield Bage	Mrs. B. L. Friedman
Mrs. Julius Baran	Mrs. Henry Glass
Mrs. Simon Baruch	Mrs. J. Goldey
Mrs. Julius Beer	Mrs. Samuel Goldberg
Mrs. Meyer Berlin	Mrs. David Goldfarb
Mrs. R. L. Bernstein	Mrs. Edward Goodman
Mrs. Elmer Black	Mrs. Herbert S. Goldstein
Mrs. J. Blau	Mrs. Eugene J. Grant
Mrs. L. Block	Mrs. Benedict J. Greenhut
Mrs. Alfred Blumenthal	Mrs. Rudolph Grossman
Mrs. Henry Bodenheimer	Mrs. Daniel Guggenheim
Mrs. Isaac Boehm	Mrs. Daniel P. Hays
Mrs. Solomon Boehm	Mrs. Moses Hyamson
Mrs. Sidney C. Borg	Mrs. M. Isaacs
Mrs. William Grant Brown	Mrs. Leon Kamaiky
Mrs. Clarence Burns	Mrs. Abraham Kassel
Mrs. A. N. Cohen	Mrs. Edwin Kaufman
Mrs. Virginia Danziger	Mrs. Julius Keller
Miss Katherine B. Davis	Mrs. Philip Klein
Mrs. M. Deiches	Mrs. Samuel Koenig
Mrs. Haryot Holt Day	Mrs. Lazarus Kohns
Mrs. Bernard Drachman	Mrs. Alexander Kohut
Mrs. E. W. Dreyfus	Mrs. Irving Lehman
Mrs. Julius Dukas	Mrs. M. L. Levenson
Mrs. William Einstein	Mrs. Philip Lewinsohn
Mrs. Morris Engelman	Mrs. Harry Lilly
Mrs. Edward Epstein	Mrs. Edward Lissman
Mrs. E. W. Lewin-Epstein	Mrs. Benjamin Leerburger
Mrs. Harry Fischel	Mrs. Albert Lucas
Mrs. Samuel Floersheimer	Mrs. M. S. Margolies

Mrs. Marcus M. Marks	Mrs. Max Phillips
Mrs. Samuel Marks	Mrs. Leopold Plaut
Mrs. Samuel Mason	Mrs. N. Taylor Phillips
Mrs. F. DeSola Mendes	Mrs. William Scheuer
Mrs. H. Pereira Mendes	Mrs. Samuel Schulman
Mrs. Mortimer M. Menken	Mrs. William Solomon
Mrs. Percival Menken	Mrs. Harold Spielberg
Mrs. Frederick Nathan	Miss Carrie Tekulski
Mrs. Moritz Neuman	Mrs. Israel Unterberg
Mrs. Charles J. Oppenheim	Mrs. Henry Villard
Mrs. Laurent Oppenheim	Mrs. Thomas J. Vivian
Mrs. A. M. Palmer	Mrs. Fred Wachtel
Miss Mary Wood	

A delegation from the Central Relief Committee was then appointed to go to Washington and formally present this token of its gratitude and esteem to the President. This delegation consisted of the following: Leon Kamaiky, president; Harry Fischel, treasurer; Albert Lucas and Morris Engelman, secretaries, and Rabbis M. S. Margolies, B. L. Leventhal, Meyer Berlin, Israel Rosenberg and Aaron Teitelbaum.

In addition to this delegation, one from the Women's Proclamation Day Committee, the women's auxiliary of the Central Relief Committee that had worked with the parent body in bringing about the success of the Jewish War Relief Day, also was named and included Mrs. Harry Fischel, Mrs. Albert Lucas, Mrs. Samuel Elkeles, Mrs. Leon Kamaiky and Mrs. David Kass.

The two delegations called jointly on President Wilson at the White House on February 17, 1927, and were presented to the President by Rabbi Silverstone and Rabbi Benjamin Gross, both of Washington. The members were received with the greatest courtesy by the President who stated in his acceptance of the Committee's gift that he deemed it a great privilege to have been afforded the opportunity of lending his assistance in such a worthy humanitarian cause. A photograph of the two delegations was taken on the White House steps before their departure.

While it was generally recognized that the Central Relief Com-

mittee, with Mr. Fischel's aid, had been responsible for bringing about the President's proclamation and his naming of a day for a national Jewish War Relief collection, no ill-feeling was created among the other relief committees.

On the contrary, on February 21, 1916, Mr. Fischel received the following letter from Jacob Billikopf, at that time Executive Secretary of the American Jewish Relief Committee in Kansas City.

Mr. Harry Fischel,  
Treasurer of the Central Relief Committee,  
63 Park Row.

Dear Mr. Fischel:

I suppose that you have received a great many congratulations upon your suggestion to Senator Martine of New Jersey which resulted in the President's setting aside January 27th as the day on which to collect money for the suffering Jews. I want to add my sincere congratulations and to express the conviction that it is in consequence of your initiative that at least a million dollars more has been raised throughout the Country for the suffering Jews than would otherwise have been collected.

I regret exceedingly that you found it impossible to stop over in Kansas City on your way to the coast. It would have given several of your admirers great pleasure to have entertained you. I trust that we may have the privilege of entertaining you in the near future, and with kind regards, I am,

Sincerely,

JACOB BILLIKOPF

Mr. Fischel at this time received many other letters and telegrams of the same tenor from prominent Jews all over the United States.

As treasurer of the Central Relief Committee Mr. Fischel had occasion at various times to sign checks for sums as high as two hundred and fifty and five hundred thousand dollars each and one check for a million dollars, a photograph of which is herewith reproduced.





## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE JEWISH ASSEMBLY OF 1917

By the year 1917, as the result of three years of effort by the various committees making collections for the work of Jewish War Relief, which had been accompanied by almost continuous appeals to the public, there was a noticeable slackening in the response on the part of the people despite the fact that the need was, if anything, more urgent than at any time since the beginning of the war.

The public was, in short, tired of giving and had grown callous to the reiterated pleas made in behalf of the sufferers in the war zones whose plight had become worse than ever and who, it was no figure of speech to state, faced annihilation through privation and want.

It was apparent that some drastic step must be taken to re-awaken the public interest and to induce contributions in larger numbers and amounts than had even thus far been secured. Accordingly the leaders of the three committees determined to call an Assembly of the representatives of the various committees throughout the United States to be held at the Spanish and Portugese Synagogue in New York, the date for which was fixed as October 28, 1917.

More than 1500 delegates from every section of the country responded to the summons and took part in the Assembly, following which the entire number were the guests of Mr. Felix M. Warburg, chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, at one of the largest dinners ever held in the Hotel Astor.

On October 25, three days before the dinner, Mr. Fischel received the following letter from Mr. Warburg:

Dear Mr. Fischel:

I take pleasure in appointing you as chairman of the dinner and one of the speakers at the dinner and conference which will be held on Sunday evening at the Hotel Astor. The subject you are to talk about is "The Orthodox Jew and Relief Work." I hope you will accept the appointment to make this address which I am sure will be very interesting to the delegates.

Very sincerely yours,

FELIX M. WARBURG

*Chairman Joint Distribution Committee.*

Mr. Fischel regarded this assignment as of such great importance that he decided not to rely upon extemporaneous remarks but to prepare his address in advance, making the following speech on this occasion:

#### THE ORTHODOX JEW AND RELIEF WORK

The subject assigned to me is "The Orthodox Jew and Relief Work." In order to make myself clear on this subject, I thought it advisable to change my usual custom of speaking extemporaneously and instead to read my remarks to you.

The Orthodox Jew, by reason of his faith, has been taught never to close his ear to the cry of the unfortunate and those in need. The greatest of our sages were wont to give a small coin to the poor before each prayer, thus fulfilling the injunction, "As for me, I will behold thy face with charity."

The records of the Central Relief Committee, of which I have the honor to be the Treasurer, show what the Orthodox Jew in this country has done in aid of his unfortunate brethren in the war zones. We have collected nearly \$2,500,000 and the money, in the main, came week in and week out, not from the rich, but from the poorest of the poor. The shoemaker, the tailor, the baker, the newsdealer, the pushcart owner, the small storekeeper; in short, the very class that feels most what it means to struggle for a living. The Orthodox Jew, as a rule, when he gives, gives not from his surplus but from his small principal.

The Orthodox Jew is enjoined to give quickly when there is a demand. A story is told in the Talmud of a man named Nachan Ish Gamzoo, who, laden with wealth, was making a journey one day. He was met by a poor man, who asked him for help. The wealthy man said to him, "I am busy with my wares, wait until I have time." In the meantime the poor man died. When the wealthy man heard what had happened he was stricken by the shock, and never recovered. We may be ever so busy with our daily tasks, but we cannot, and must not say to the ever increasing destitute men, women and children: "Postpone your starving until the end of the year when I take stock." No, we must give and keep on giving, now.

An interesting case of raising money for war relief occurred in a small town. A campaign was held there, about \$400 was collected. The question arose as to who was to bring the money to the Central Relief Committee in New York. This was recognized to be an honor worth bidding for. Three of the committee bid for this honor. One bid \$25, another \$30, and still another \$25. When the bidding was over, the Rabbi, according to the law laid down by our sages, decided that bids made for charity must not be withdrawn. The instruction, therefore, was that each one must pay his offering, and since each one had to pay the amount of his bid, all of the three came to New York with the money. In this way not only was \$90 added to the Fund but the spirit in which the Orthodox Jew gives his charity was proven.

It is not so long ago that the Orthodox Jew was charged with not doing his share towards relieving the conditions of the poor. Nothing can better disprove this false accusation than the record of the Central Relief Committee. The Orthodox Jews have not alone given in proportion to their means, but they have given far beyond their means. In many instances large sums were realized by virtue of the fact that our immigrant settlers have headed the lists of subscribers.

You know the ancient teachings of our Sages who said:

"He who saves one life is as if he were saving a world, for each man is a little world in himself."

The Jewish people in the war zones are now in a most critical position. Like the patient who is seriously ill, and concerning whom the physician says to his friend, "If we can tide him over for another week he will become well," so it is with our people, starving both physically and spiritually. They need temporary

aid. If you give it, they will come out well, if not, Jewry of Russia, Roumania and Palestine will be depleted.

Let me say a word here of appreciation and thanks to the Rabbis present, also to the Presidents of Congregations, Chairmen of Committees, and all other workers for war relief. It was their task to keep the enthusiasm alive by their constant agitation, to awaken that Jewish Consciousness, which, once aroused, remains a dominant power for good. It was with their assistance, that the Central Relief Committee was able to raise and help in raising large sums, although insufficient to put away the sight of starvation, which is continually staring our unfortunate brethren in the face. That is why this conference has been called. What was done is history. What is yet to be done depends upon you.

In addition to war relief which it has been your work to perform, it is most essential that you devote your best energy also to constructive relief work which must necessarily embrace the work of building up the Jewish Centers, and thus, preserve the Jewish spirit. We are satisfied that you will continue to work harder and harder, so that in the end, the results becoming greater and greater, will enable our Orthodox brethren to boast of a record which the Central Relief Committee is anxious to preserve for its constituents. In that way, Orthodox Jewry in America will be enabled to enjoy the pride and satisfaction of knowing that it has done its full duty.

Our Committee feels it their duty also to thank our beloved Government and its leaders for the human interest it has taken in the affairs of Jewry abroad. Our Government has listened to every plea of ours and has carried out every demand possible and in time.

I believe the generosity of our beloved President Wilson, who proclaimed January 27th, 1915, the day for Jewish Relief, which made it possible to raise a large sum of money for relief, is still fresh in your minds. While all the Committees reaped the benefit of this day, however, this proclamation was declared by our President through the efforts of the Central Relief Committee.

We also wish to render thanks in our name, and in the name of our branches, to the Government, for its work in forwarding money to relatives and designated institutions in Palestine. Thanks are due to Ambassadors Morgenthau and Elkus, also

the American Consul at Jerusalem, Dr. Otto Glazebrook, for their efforts in our behalf, in this special direction.

We must never forget our allegiance and wholehearted devotion to our country. The Orthodox Jew, who is commanded by the observance of his faith to remain true to his God, must necessarily be loyal to his country. In looking up the definition of religion, I found that it is defined as obedience to a higher order of things. Citizenship is defined as respect for law and order. Religion and citizenship overlap each other, to be a religious Jew is synonymous with being a loyal citizen.

I am certain that the Orthodox Jew, liberal as he is, in trying to save his co-religionists in the different parts of the world, is likewise discharging his full duty to the Stars and Stripes. This day, being set aside as a day of prayer, by the Proclamation of President Wilson, let us all meditate and fervently pray that the year 1918 will bring victory for America, and thereby assure Democracy to the World, as well as justice to the Jew.

On October 29, the day following the dinner, Mr. Fischel received the following letter from Mr. Felix M. Warburg:

My dear Mr. Fischel:

That the Assembly and dinner last evening was such an unqualified success was due in a large measure to your efforts and I desire to express to you my heartfelt appreciation therefore.

Cordially yours,

FELIX M. WARBURG

In addition to other steps taken as a result of the Assembly, (possibly the most notable gathering of Jews of every shade of opinion in the history of the country,) was the appointment of a Committee of Five to consult with the different collecting agencies throughout the United States, with a view to formulating a plan for further unifying the work of the existing relief committees and of systematizing and increasing the collections. Mr. Fischel was named by the chairman, Dr. Cyrus Adler, of Philadelphia, as one of the members of this special committee.

Through his connection with the war relief work and his many

other activities Mr. Fischel's name was, by now, widely known not only in America but throughout Europe and Palestine, having in fact reached to the smallest communities. The reputation which he had earned by so many years of effort in widely diversified philanthropic and commercial activities, was to largely increase his opportunities for future service.

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	TOTAL	
	DEDUCTIONS	
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FOR THE RELIEF OF JEWS SUFFERING THROUGH THE WAR  
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SUFFERING THROUGH THE WAR

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Guaranty Trust Company of New York  
New York

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*Larry Fischel*  
TREASURER

THE MILLION DOLLAR CHECK  
For Jewish War Sufferers signed by Mr. Fischel as Treasurer  
of the Central Relief Committee.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BEGINNINGS OF YESHIVA COLLEGE

EARLY in the year 1915 Mr. Fischel was afforded the privilege of lending fresh impetus to a cause that had always lain closest to his heart, that of higher Jewish religious training.

From the efforts put forth at this time the foundation for the great Yeshiva College, that in later years was to be one of the most important achievements of Orthodox Jewry in America, was actually laid.

The Yeshiva Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, of which Mr. Fischel was Vice President and to which he had always found it possible to give a considerable part of his time and energy, was housed at this time in a building at 156 Henry Street.

The war had indirectly placed additional responsibilities on this institution as in the early days of the conflict many of the students in European Yeshivas managed to leave their native lands and had come to America where they sought to continue their studies. As a result the building occupied by the Theological Seminary, an old and unsuitable structure, had become greatly overcrowded and many applicants had to be denied admission to the institution.

Mr. Fischel was requested to look for a site on which to erect a new building. He was at this time also associated with the Yeshiva Etz Chaim, at 85 Henry Street, having in 1895 served as the Chairman of its Building Committee, when it was provided with the home it occupied at this time. This Yeshiva also was badly overcrowded and in need of a new building, and, as a number of its directors, like Mr. Fischel, were also directors of the Yeshiva Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, it was possible for the two institutions to be brought together in a satisfactory merger.

Mr. Fischel was selected as Chairman of the Building Committee to seek a site and prepare plans for a new building which should house both institutions. In the early part of 1915 he was successful in purchasing two houses at 9-11 Montgomery Street. He immediately started to convert this property into a modern and fireproof educational building, having every facility needed to carry on the work.

The cornerstone of the New Yeshiva building was laid by Mr. Fischel on July 1, 1915. The event was celebrated by the Orthodox Jews of New York as a holiday as it was the first time in the history of the city that a building had been constructed solely for the purpose of imparting Talmudic knowledge. Many of the leaders in Jewish education, as well as prominent Rabbis, made addresses appropriate to such a significant occasion.

Much stress was laid both in the English and Jewish press on the incentive to Talmudic knowledge contributed by the new Yeshiva building. The account of the occasion appearing in the Hebrew Standard is herewith reproduced:

#### CORNERSTONE FOR YESHIVA LAID

JULY 1ST, 1915

The cornerstone for the new Rabbinical College of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and the Yeshibath Etz Chaim was laid last Thursday afternoon in the presence of a notable gathering of rabbis and prominent Orthodox laymen. The exercises consisted of a prayer by Rabbi M. S. Margolies, a greeting by the president, Mr. Jacob Hecht, and addresses by Borough President Marcus M. Marks, Rev. Dr. Bernard Drachman, Commissioner of Education, I. M. Levy, Rabbi S. E. Jaffe, Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein and Mr. Harry Fischel.

After the singing of Hatikva, the cornerstone was laid by Mr. Fischel, the honor being conferred upon him in recognition of his preliminary work in assuring the success of the institution.

Mr. Fischel said: "We have assembled this day for the purpose of celebrating the laying of the cornerstone of a new institution, an institution which was established to fill a want that has

long been felt, not only by the Jewish community of New York City, but by Jews all over the United States.

"The new Rabbinical College, whose birth it is now our privilege to witness, holds forth as its object 'Orthodox Judaism and Americanism,' that is, its aim shall be to educate and produce Orthodox rabbis who will be able to deliver sermons in English, so that they may appeal to the hearts of the younger generation, and, at the same time, who will be thoroughly qualified to occupy positions with congregations demanding conformity with the strict requirements of Orthodox Judaism.

"At this point I wish to emphasize strongly that the Rabbinical College does not intend to set itself up in opposition to, or in competition with, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, of which Professor Schechter is president. On the contrary, it is our earnest desire to cooperate with that institution as far as is possible for us to do so. It is true that the Jewish Theological Seminary is accomplishing splendid results in sending forth rabbis who are able to deliver good English sermons, but these rabbis, with very few exceptions, do not meet the requirements of Orthodox congregations. It is the purpose of this new Rabbinical College, not only to produce rabbis who are thoroughly versed in rabbinical culture and who can deliver sermons in English, but they must also have the authority to decide ritual questions, technically called *Torath Haw rawooy*.

"The new Rabbinical college is unique in its creation. Although new in its plans and purpose, yet it begins its career upon a solid foundation. This is due to the fact that it is a combination of two long established institutions which have been in existence for over twenty-five years, namely the Yeshibath Etz Chaim and the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. These two institutions not only have the confidence of the Jews of the City of New York, but they have the support and backing of the country at large and therefore the success of this new undertaking is assured.

"My friends, as we are sitting here in comfort, enjoying the rights and privileges of peace and liberty under the protection of the Stars and Stripes, our brothers in the war zones are dying by the thousands. Not alone should we mourn the fate of all those who are losing their lives in the death struggle of nations, but especially should we mourn the loss of the scores of Jewish young men who are being killed on the battle fields, from whom

this country has been nourished with Talmudical knowledge and who have supplied the material for such rabbis as this institution seeks to develop and produce. Since the supply of students which we could expect from the foreign countries has been reduced, it is therefore our duty to interest young American boys in the study of rabbinical culture, and these young boys should not alone fill the loss which we have sustained through the war, but they should make better material for this institution because they possess the American flow of language which should enable them to better appeal to the younger element.

"It is our aim to produce educated rabbis, yet we are mindful of the fact that in order to produce ten rabbis it is necessary to educate at least one hundred young boys, so as to have material from which to select those who are eligible to take up the study of rabbinical culture. The rest will possess enough knowledge to fill many other high positions in Jewish educational institutions. It is our intention to bring up the students of this Rabbinical College in the utmost religious environment and to enable them to devote their undivided time to their studies, without being compelled to earn their livelihood. We have therefore provided in this building an up-to-date kitchen and dining room, where the students will be supplied with food and, in addition thereto, they will be furnished with the necessities of life, so that they may concentrate all their energies on their religious work and acquire the title of Rabbi in as short a time as possible. I wish to say further that this building will contain well lighted and ventilated class rooms and all the latest sanitary improvements. We have spared no effort to equip this institution in as efficient a manner as possible."

Other addresses were made by Rabbis H. Masliansky, B. M. Leventhal; A. L. Alperstern; M. J. Peliuss; J. Rosenberg; J. Kanovitz; Meyer Berlin and I. Siegel. The proceedings were concluded with a prayer by Rabbi Wolf Margolies.

Among the subscribers to the institution are Mr. and Mrs. Harry Fischel \$2,000; Mr. Nathan Roggen, \$1,250; Jacob H. Schiff \$1,000; Estate of Joseph Oshinsky, \$1,000; S. Heller, \$1,000; M. Friedman, \$500; Jacob Hecht, \$500; Nathan Lamport \$500; Mr. Kommel \$500; and I. Rokeach \$500.

The new institution will be under the supervision of Dr. Bernard Revel, an eminent pedagogue, who was born in Kovno, Russia, in 1887. He is the son of the famous scholar Nahum Shraga,

who was rabbi in Pren and Linkovo and son-in-law of the great Gaon Rabbi Moses Isaac, of Peneves. He received his Jewish education and was ordained Rabbi in 1901. He also received a collegiate education in Russia and came to America in 1907. He studied law at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa. and received the degree of M.A. from the New York University, and Ph.D. from Dropsie College. He is the author of "Bachya Ibn Pakudah, Karaite Halakah" and a contributor of articles to the Jewish Quarterly Review and other English and Hebrew publications. He was associate editor of the Hebrew Encyclopedia "Ozar Israel." Dr. Revel is a member of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis and was its secretary 1908-9. He is a member of the American Orthodox Oriental Society and other institutions.

No time was lost in the construction of the building under Mr. Fischel's direction so that a dedication commensurate with the importance of the event took place on December 15th of the same year and attracted nation-wide attention. The dedication was attended by the Acting Mayor of the City, the Hon. George McAneny and many other officials, noted Rabbis, educators and prominent laymen.

The celebration in connection with the dedication, lasted for an entire week. It was generally looked upon as one of the most important in the history of the Jewish people in the United States, for the completion of the building marked the taking of a notable step for the advancement of Talmudic knowledge.

As Chairman of the Building Committee it devolved upon Mr. Fischel to present the key of the new building to Mr. Jacob Hecht, president of the institution, with an appropriate address. The newspapers again devoted much space to the institution and the vast importance it spelled to the future of Orthodox Judaism in America. The following article appeared in the Hebrew Standard:

## NEW RABBINICAL COLLEGE OPENED

The dedication of the building of the Rabbinical College No. 9-11 Montgomery Street took place last Sunday afternoon. The opening marks an important step in Jewish history in the United States for it is the first Orthodox institution which seeks to train English-speaking rabbis.

Mr. Harry Fischel presided and the exercises were opened with Jewish melodies by the band of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. Rabbi M. S. Margolies delivered a prayer and then explained the importance of the occasion. Mr. Fischel, as chairman of the building committee, presented the key to Mr. Jacob Hecht, president of the institution, and delivered an address which included the report of the committee. Mr. Fischel said among other things:

"My friends, this building which we are dedicating today is simple in design, yet beautiful in its construction. Our Building Committee took special pains in providing this building with the most modern improvements, so that it is strictly fireproof, has plenty of air and light, and contains all the latest sanitary devices, including shower baths of the newest design.

"It is true that this building is extremely small in proportion to the demand made upon us by the Orthodox congregations all over the United States, but we are told by our sages that the reason we begin the lighting of one candle on the first night of Chanukah and increase the number of candles every night thereafter is because, in everything that is Holy, we should always increase and never decrease, which was the theory of the School of Hillel. So with our Yeshivah, while we are beginning with a comparatively small building, yet we hope that it will grow in strength and usefulness from year to year until we achieve the great result for which we are aiming, and it is our hope that, like a seed which is carefully planted in fertile soil, this institution will grow into a flourishing plant, whose fruit will refresh and revive Judaism in the whole of the United States.

"Now, Mr. President, I am prepared to deliver the key of this building to you on behalf of the Board of Directors. Before doing so, however, I believe it is my duty to give a brief statement of the cost of the construction of the building.

"I want to emphasize the fact that although the amount ex-

pended in altering this building is only the nominal sum of a little over \$16,000 yet I am proud to state that, with the exception of the two side walls, this building is entirely new and is equal in every respect to a new building which would have cost more than twice the sum. This was due to the great efforts of the Building Committee."

Mr. Hecht in accepting the key thanked the Chairman of the Building Committee for his efforts in completing the building at such low cost.

Hon. George McAneny, acting Mayor of the City of New York, delivered an eloquent address, in which he thanked the institution for relieving the city of work and responsibility in undertaking its splendid educational project. Isidore Montefiore Levy, Commissioner of Education, emphasized the fact that the Board of Education welcomes institutions of this kind. The Rev. Herbert S. Goldstein called upon the younger generation to make some sacrifices for Judaism, and to take up the work of the Rabbinical College. He also made an urgent entreaty to the public for funds. The Chanukah lights were lit by Cantor Rothman, and the prayer was chanted by the assembly. An address by the Rev. Harris Masliansky followed, and Dr. H. Pereira Mendes closed the exercises for the afternoon session by delivering the benediction.

The exercises continued in the evening and eloquent addresses were delivered by the Rev. Dr. Philip Klein, Rev. Dr. Bernard Drachman, Rev. Meyer Berlin, Rev. Jos. Konowitz and Mr. M. Finesilber.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### SEEING AMERICA WITH A PURPOSE

FOLLOWING the laying of the Yeshivah cornerstone in the summer of 1915, Mr. Fischel, who, for a long period had been continually engaged with many exacting duties, determined it would be advisable to take a vacation but one that should at the same time give him the opportunity to keep in touch with the war relief work throughout the nation and be of help in stimulating collections in the communities he planned to visit.

He decided, in other words, to tour the country. He had several times visited Europe but, like many other Americans, had neglected to see America first, not having gone further west than St. Louis in the year of the World's fair in that city. With his wife and two unmarried daughters, Bertha Marion and Rose, he decided, therefore, on a trip across the continent to San Francisco planning while en route to visit the leading cities of the country, including in his itinerary Yellowstone Park and the Jewish Home for Consumptives at Denver, Colorado.

The Fischels left New York on a Thursday. In order not to desecrate the Sabbath by traveling it was arranged to remain in Chicago over Saturday. On his arrival in Chicago early Friday afternoon, Mr. Fischel was met at the station by a local committee representing the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, which informed him of plans to hold a dinner in his honor. Mr. Fischel advised the Committee that he could not at that time accept such an invitation but promised the members that on his return from the Pacific Coast he would remain in Chicago for a longer time and would then take up the matter of such a function with them.

The party left Chicago on Sunday morning and were due to arrive in San Francisco on the Wednesday evening following.

When they reached Denver, however, Mr. Fischel decided that this was an opportune time to visit the Jewish Home for Consumptives, in which he had long taken a very keen interest.

Following an inspection of the institution Mr. Fischel found that his party would be compelled to remain for the night as the Superintendent had arranged an entertainment in their honor.

At this entertainment Mr. Fischel was called upon to make an address and expressed his sympathy for the patients. Many sufferers from the same disease, he pointed out, were without any such aids to their recovery as were here afforded.

The party proceeded the next morning on their journey to San Francisco where they were scheduled to arrive at noon on Friday. On Thursday at about six o'clock in the evening, when the train had reached the Great Desert, the conductor informed Mr. Fischel they were twelve hours late and could not possibly reach San Francisco before Friday at midnight.

Mr. Fischel was beside himself at this news. For the first time in his life and while on a pleasure trip, he would be compelled to desecrate the Sabbath, a temptation he had avoided in all his life even when facing the utmost poverty and want.

The thought occurred to him that it might be possible to leave the train and stop at some small place over the Sabbath but when he asked as to this he was told that as they were on the desert there was no place at which the train would stop until it arrived at Sacramento, which was only four hours from San Francisco and where they were not due until eight o'clock on Friday evening, still too late to prevent the desecration of the Sabbath.

As a way out of his dilemma, Mr. Fischel was reminded of the expression, "money will move mountains" and thought to himself that if this was true, certainly money ought to be able to make a train move faster. He was ready, indeed, to pay any amount to the trainmen if he could accomplish his purpose of arriving in San Francisco before sunset the next day, but he realized that it would be difficult for him to impress upon the

conductor the urgency of his demand if he attempted to explain to him the religious motive by which he was actuated.

Accordingly, he summoned the conductor and told him he had a very important appointment in San Francisco at six o'clock on Friday evening and that it would be worth any amount of money to him to reach there by that hour.

The prospect of earning such a reward naturally appealed to the conductor but he told Mr. Fischel that unfortunately he could not take advantage of it for the reason that he was quitting the train at midnight and his place would be taken by another. He agreed, however, that when this man relieved him he would try to arrange some way by which Mr. Fischel's wish could be realized and the two employes would divide the money, a considerable sum, between them.

Mr. Fischel, needless to say, remained up to meet the second conductor as arranged and it was agreed by him to do everything possible to accelerate the speed of the train which rushed along at the rate of probably sixty miles an hour until, at two o'clock Friday afternoon, it was approaching Sacramento. It required but four hours from there to complete the journey to San Francisco. At this time, however, the train's speed began to slacken and Mr. Fischel and his family were prepared, if need be, to remain in Sacramento over Saturday.

When that city was reached the temperature was 120 degrees in the shade, something the Fischels had never experienced in their lives. Mr. Fischel scarcely knew what to do. Fearing that to remain in Sacramento in such heat might endanger the health of his wife and daughters he again consulted the conductor and upon being informed that the train would arrive in San Francisco not later than seven o'clock he decided that his only course was to continue on the journey. As a matter of fact the train arrived in San Francisco at six-thirty.

On arrival the party was met at the station by a delegation from the San Francisco Branch of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. They found that this committee had

prepared an apartment for their stay in that city where they might faithfully observe the dietary laws.

Although Mr. Fischel's purpose in making this trip was primarily for rest and recreation he learned that a war relief meeting had been arranged in advance of his coming by Rabbi Bernard Drachman, a director of the Central Jewish Relief Committee and Morris Engelman, its secretary, which meeting he was, of course, expected to attend.

This meeting, participated in by many of the Jewish leaders of San Francisco, occurred on August 2 and following an appeal made by Mr. Fischel and the other speakers, resulted in the collection of a large sum of money and the securing of many pledges. The meeting formally launched the relief work in San Francisco on a systematic basis.

The Fischels remained in San Francisco about three weeks deciding to return by the way of Yellowstone Park to view the beauties of that wonderland of nature. Their first stop was at Portland, Oregon, where they were met by a representative of the Jewish Tribune, at that time the leading English-Jewish publication of the West, who informed Mr. Fischel that he had been assigned by the editor to accompany him on his trip and to report his activities while in the west.

From Portland the party went to Seattle, Washington, thence to Spokane, to Yellowstone Park, to St. Paul and back to Chicago. In every city they were met by welcoming committees.

In many of these cities Mr. Fischel was asked to give his advice on some particularly intricate and puzzling local question, as, for instance, in one city it was how a loan might be raised to build water works, in another, how the school conditions might be improved and in a third, what could be done toward making the city more beautiful.

One such experience he had in Seattle, Washington, is of especial interest. On arriving in that city, Mr. Fischel was met by a committee representing the Seattle Branch of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. This Committee was

headed by a Mr. Kessler, the president of an Orthodox Congregation, which had just completed the construction of a beautiful new synagogue.

Mr. Kessler related that the Congregation had always been scrupulous in its observance and that the new synagogue had accordingly been so constructed that its seating arrangements provided for the separation of the sexes, with a gallery for the women and the lower floor to be occupied by the men.

With the completion of the structure, however, a quarrel had arisen over these provisions, their being some of the trustees who were not so strictly Orthodox in their views as others. Mr. Kessler informed Mr. Fischel that as President of the Congregation and as the one who had devoted his entire time to the undertaking for the past two years he could not consent to having the sexes mingle at worship.

He declared that he felt sure from what he knew of Mr. Fischel's views on religion he would support him in his position against this desecration of the building. Mr. Fischel replied that inasmuch as he did not know a single member of the congregation it would be rather an embarrassing and delicate matter for him to exert pressure to decide such an issue but that, as a question of religious principle was involved, he would do all in his power to help solve the difficulty.

Mr. Kessler then called a meeting of the directors of the local branch of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, most of whom it happened were also trustees of the Congregation, to meet in the Synagogue and to be addressed by Mr. Fischel.

Mr. Fischel first reviewed the general immigration problems and told of the work done in the main office in New York, after which he took advantage of the opportunity to try to persuade the directors of the Congregation who were present to adhere to the original plan for separation of the sexes in the structure. In the course of his argument Mr. Fischel said:

"Many congregations today, Orthodox in other respects, are

seeking to amend the ancient Jewish tradition which provides for the separation of the sexes during religious services.

"This tradition is as essential to the preservation of our faith as any other. It is not intended to place women in a position inferior to man, but is aimed primarily at the man, rather than the woman, its purpose being to enable the man to worship in true purity of thought and undisturbed by the distractions of feminine proximity during services."

The manner in which Mr. Fischel put the matter succeeded in its purpose and on his return to New York he received a letter of thanks, with a resolution signed by the trustees expressing their gratitude for his efforts in causing the Congregation to come to an agreement in accordance with the traditions of the faith.

On the Fischel's arrival in St. Paul they were met by a committee of war relief workers who also had arranged a meeting in that city. At this meeting Mr. Fischel made an appeal resulting in the collection of a large sum of money which was at once forwarded to New York.

Returning to Chicago, Mr. Fischel was compelled to fulfill his promise to the members of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society in that city to attend a dinner given in his honor. The Fischels finally came back to New York during the month of September.

## CHAPTER XXX

### REVOLUTIONIZES REAL ESTATE FINANCING WITH PLAN FOR MORTGAGE AMORTIZATION

It was on his return from his tour to the Coast that Mr. Fischel put forth a new business idea which was to largely revolutionize the system of real estate financing as then in force and was to exert a large influence in the prevention of future periods of real estate depression.

This plan, as it came into general use, also protected the small investor from loss and had the effect of stabilizing the realty market in a degree that no previous expedient had accomplished.

The plan, which, in a word, was the introduction of the system of mortgage amortization, was worked out by Mr. Fischel during the hours he spent in the long train journeys from city to city while on his vacation, and again showed that, large as was his contribution to communal, philanthropic, educational and religious undertakings, his business acumen and judgment were productive of equally important results.

Mr. Fischel had given a great deal of thought to the causes leading to the recurring financial panics of different years, particularly as these panics affected the stability of real estate securities. In reviewing these periods of depression, through which he had been so fortunate as to pass practically unscathed, he was especially impressed with the fact that the panic of 1893 was virtually forgotten in less than a year and normal conditions restored in a year and a half. Following the panic of 1907, however, eight years had elapsed with little or no improvement, insofar as real estate conditions were concerned.

Every business other than real estate had gone back to normal, but realty, instead of recovering, was, if anything, in a worse situation than in the panic's darkest days. What could be the

basic cause of such a wide discrepancy in the effects of the two periods of financial stress, Mr. Fischel pondered.

He finally concluded that the answer was to be found in the wholesale calling of mortgages as soon as they were due.

Mortgages were called in, either in their entirety or there came the demand for large payments toward their reduction or for their renewal, demands which the owners of real estate were given no time to satisfy or else were not in a position to meet.

When these demands were not met the mortgages were immediately foreclosed, with the result that the property was bought in by the mortgagee, the owner of record frequently losing his entire equity.

The solution for this situation, Mr. Fischel decided, was the adoption of a plan for amortizing mortgages over a long period, rather than the summary call for payment for the entire amount or for an unreasonable reduction on short notice.

Such a plan Mr. Fischel worked out in detail, giving it to the public through the Associated Press on November 7, 1915. This plan in full was as follows:

#### THE REAL ESTATE PROBLEM IN NEW YORK CITY

A SUGGESTED SOLUTION

Nov. 7th, 1915

(Addressed particularly to Mortgagees

By MR. HARRY FISCHEL)

It is a well-known fact that real estate in the City of New York has suffered more than any other business or investment. The New York real estate market passed through several dangerous periods in the last few decades, namely in 1873, 1893 and 1907, but at no time were the conditions as critical as they are today. The panic of 1893 was not limited to real estate alone. Naturally, real estate suffered in common with all other business. But the panic lasted only one year. Confidence was soon restored. Activity in the real estate field increased and investments were made more freely than before. The panic proved

to be merely an acute sickness and the man of finance administered the cure rapidly and effectively by placing plenty of money in the market on liberal terms. The best proof of recovery was that there were abundant purchasers for real estate both at public auction and private sales where property could be bought at reasonable prices.

It is quite remarkable how different was the panic of 1907, which still continues its depressing influence. Almost nine years have elapsed and not only is no sign of relief in sight, but conditions are getting worse each year.

The sickness has become chronic!

Men with money will invest in speculative transactions even at low rates of interest, but refrain from investing in real estate, which would yield a good income and be a much safer investment.

There are two questions which arise from this state of facts.

1. Why do such conditions exist?
2. What is to be done to remedy this chronic evil?

While realty owners are suffering considerably from the many persecutions of the various city and state departments, which compel them to make considerable expenditures, nevertheless, this would not have deterred real estate investors, because the income from real estate is too tempting. There must be some other reason why hundreds of millions of dollars are lying idle in vaults, or at very low rates of interest in trust companies. The owners of this money would gladly invest it in real estate but they are afraid to do so.

THE REASON IS THAT THEY ARE NEVER SAFE WITH THEIR INVESTMENT, ON ACCOUNT OF THE MORTGAGEES, WHO HAVE MADE IT A PRACTICE TO DEMAND PART OF THE MONEY AS SOON AS THE MORTGAGE IS MATURED—no matter if the mortgage debt amounts to a very small percentage of the value of the property.

There was a time when investors were safe in buying property by investing from 25% to 40% of the value of the purchase, but today, conditions are such that even 50% or 60% of the value is not safe, because you do not know how soon the mortgagee will demand part payment. If the real estate owner has not the ready cash to meet this demand, and if there are no ready purchasers to buy the property at any price, the natural result is that his entire investment is lost, and the property goes to the

mortgagee. There is no doubt that the mortgagee as a rule does not want the property, but is compelled to take it against his own wishes. It is the old story of the dog in the manger. Such is the state of affairs existing today.

I have spoken to many of the largest money lenders in the City of New York, and not a single one could give any reason for demanding that the mortgages be reduced. It was simply a case of doing what the other fellow does. It can be readily understood that this fact not alone has withheld hundreds of millions of dollars from being invested in real estate, but it has brought matters to such a pass that all the financial institutions are stocked up with a lot of real estate, which is frequently managed by incompetent men, whereas, had the owner of the property been let alone, he could have managed it in a much better way, to the advantage of all concerned. This cannot be denied by anyone who is at all cognizant of the real estate situation.

Now as to the cure. There is only one way to remedy this existing evil, and that is, by a united effort of all the largest money-lenders in New York to have their mortgages amortized. To explain—every mortgagee should demand regularly, the payment of 2% of the amount of the mortgage each year, so that every real estate owner should be compelled (and would gladly do so) to add the amount of the amortization to the annual running expenses of the property. In this way, he would be prepared to meet the demands of the mortgagees without feeling any hardship. By paying regularly the amount of 2% each year, the owner would have less interest to pay each year, and the mortgagee would be paid off, without any difficulty on the part of the owner. In addition thereto, instead of the mortgagees being compelled to take the property, there would always be a big sum of money flowing into their hands, which could be placed on new buildings or expended in the construction of new improvements, so that this system would stimulate activity in the erection of new buildings and in real estate in general.

I can readily understand that this plan may be opposed by many of the attorneys for the mortgagees whose income would be reduced in this branch of their profession. By having the mortgages remain, they lose their fees in replacing the amount of the mortgage elsewhere, searching titles, etc. But they should stop to consider that a large sum of money would come annually into the hands of their clients from the amount of the amortiza-

tion, which money could be replaced and, in addition thereto, real estate investors, knowing that they would not be called upon to pay off the mortgage, this would stimulate real estate transactions, increasing the income of the attorneys.

Therefore, for the reasons stated herein, I hope that the time will soon come when the money lenders will realize that it is to their advantage to accept the suggestion herein contained.

Mr. Fischel's proposals for a solution of this difficult problem were favorably received and secured the endorsement of many of the most prominent bankers, heads of real estate companies and others who were experts in this field of finance. The plan, furthermore, evoked many columns of newspaper discussion and comment.

The headings of some of the principal New York newspapers, many of which carried Mr. Fischel's proposal in full, are given herewith.

#### NEW YORK HERALD

"Mr. Harry Fischel an old-time real estate man calls on money lenders to relax their grip on the realty market. He advocates long term amortizing loans. He says that indiscriminate, unwarranted reduction and calling of mortgages is direct cause of realty's distress. Millions of dollars withheld because of fear that element of safety is missing."

#### NEW YORK TIMES

"Amortized mortgages plan grows in favor. Plan proposed by Harry Fischel, real estate man and builder."

#### NEW YORK TRIBUNE

"Harry Fischel finds solution for relieving big problem in financing. His plan will release more money for city's development."

So much discussion was, in fact, aroused over the plan and so many questions were asked regarding it that Mr. Fischel prepared a supplementary article answering some of these questions. This article follows:

THE EFFECT OF THE AMORTIZATION PLAN UPON THE OWNERS  
OF SMALL MORTGAGES

(A Supplementary Article)

After presenting my suggestion to the public through the courtesy of the press, the following question was put to me:

"How can the trustees and other owners of small mortgages dispose of the annual payment which is to be made on account of the principal if they loan their money on a mortgage having the amortization plan in it?"

My answer is that there would be two methods of reinvesting this money.

First, title companies today are loaning out money and issuing certificates in which these small investors could invest the amount of money which they receive annually on the amortization plan. It is true that these certificates are not liquidable, but should this amortization plan come into effect, the title companies would undoubtedly arrange some method whereby these certificates might become liquidable upon, say, sixty or ninety days' notice. It should be remembered that a large sum of money would always come from the annual payments of the principal according to the amortization plan, which would be more than sufficient to meet any demands of these holders of certificates who might desire to liquidate them.

Secondly, should this amortization plan be generally accepted, there could be, and I am certain there would be, strong financial companies organized, for the special purpose of obtaining money from small investors, on the basis of some such plan as suggested for the title companies.

Experience has shown that the demand regulates the supply.

I wish to say that while it is practically impossible to amortize ALL mortgages in the city of New York today, however, this should not affect the large majority of mortgages, which are held by the big financial institutions, such as the life insurance companies, trust companies, savings banks, etc., of which there are many in the City of New York, and which have many millions of dollars invested in mortgages. These mortgagees would always receive enough during a short period, to make another loan. Hence, they would be enabled to loan at least fifty per cent more annually than they can do under the present conditions, without

impairing any interest of their own, and certainly without impairing any interest of the owners of the property. In this way, new buildings would be encouraged in neighborhoods which are being entirely neglected today, on account of the impossibility of obtaining loans. Therefore, although there may be a small number of mortgages to which the amortization plan would not apply, nevertheless, this fact should not affect the acceptance of the plan by the large mortgagees.

In conclusion, I desire to point out that under the present practice of demanding part payment to be made upon the maturity of a mortgage, the owners of the small mortgages and trustees of estates are in no better position today, with the small amount which they receive when the mortgage matures. On the contrary, their position is worse, for they are not certain whether they will receive this payment and may be compelled to take in the property.

As the immediate result of Mr. Fischel's suggestion, he received scores of letters, many of them from officials of the title companies, and executors of estates, in addition to owners of property.

More important yet, however, his suggestions were at once acted upon by many of the larger institutions as well as by individual lenders of money on bond and mortgage so that the amortization principle came into general use and is being practiced to the present day.

The easing of the mortgage money market, largely accomplished as a result of this suggestion, brought about an immediate improvement in real estate conditions generally, so that prosperity in this field has continued to increase and the security of real estate has never been greater than today both as an investment for the owner and for the mortgagee.

A cause for even larger gratification was the fact that a way was found by this plan to help many poor people to retain the savings of many years which they had invested in real estate and which, under the old system, were in constant jeopardy.



ONE OF THE EARLIEST OF GREAT APARTMENT  
HOUSES ON FASHIONABLE PARK AVENUE  
*Erected by Mr. Fischel in 1915.*



## CHAPTER XXXI

### EARLY APARTMENTS ON PARK AND FIFTH AVENUES

ANOTHER important milestone in Mr. Fischel's career, on its business side, occurred in this year, that of 1915, when he engaged in his first building operations on Park and Fifth Avenues.

Here again, he was among the pioneers in the construction of the earliest of those great apartment structures which now line these thoroughfares and which were to completely change their character, providing homes for hundreds of the wealthiest and most socially prominent families in New York.

In returning to business activity on an extensive scale at this time, Mr. Fischel was chiefly moved by the fact that his war relief work had made exceptionally heavy demands upon him and he was anxious to be placed in a position where he could continue unabated his philanthropic endeavors.

As had been true throughout his life the opportunity was again presented to him. It had been his experience in the past that the more he contributed to charitable causes, the greater was his prosperity in material affairs and, as his influence continued to grow in the field of philanthropy, so he also loomed larger as a leader in the financial and business world. One result of this was that promising business propositions were continually being brought to his attention.

America, had not at this time yet been drawn into the war, nor was there then the belief that she would be. On the other hand, many persons were being made rich as the result of business enterprises due to the war and with the sudden acquisition of wealth sought to live in a manner befitting their new circumstances.

Mr. Fischel learned that Park Avenue was the street most likely to be favored for the future homes of the rich and that

large apartment houses on that avenue would be in demand. In order that he might have a part in this new housing development he decided to seek a site on this Avenue on which to carry out his plans.

The opportunity came to him to secure from the New York Central Railroad a long lease of the entire block fronting on Park Avenue, from Fiftieth to Fifty-first streets, and, by an odd coincidence, the lease for this property was signed on the same day on which Mr. Fischel laid the cornerstone of the new Yeshivah Building. Having acquired this plot, Mr. Fischel proceeded to make an intensive study of the city's leading apartment structures with the result that he was able to erect on this site a building containing many improvements over the finest apartment houses that had been built up to this time.

Before leaving on his trip to see America, Mr. Fischel commissioned the well known architects, Warren and Wetmore, architects for the New York Central Railroad Terminal, to prepare plans for this great new apartment building and these were subsequently drawn in accordance with a sketch Mr. Fischel left with them.

The plans were completed on Mr. Fischel's return but did not meet with his entire approval. Despite the great knowledge and reputation the firm of Warren and Wetmore enjoyed, they welcomed every suggestion Mr. Fischel made to them and on one occasion, in the presence of Mr. William Newman, vice president of the New York Central Railroad, Mr. Wetmore took occasion to say, "I have learned more from Mr. Harry Fischel than from some of my work in college."

During Mr. Fischel's absence from the city the foundations for the building were completed by his associate Mr. Joseph Ravitch, and, on his return, following his approval of the amended plans, the work of construction rapidly proceeded. While this was Mr. Fischel's first experience with high class apartment buildings, he gave close attention to the requirement of tenants of the type ready to pay the high rentals that were asked and

introduced a number of improvements which other buildings of the same class lacked. As a result, when the building was finished the news rapidly spread among the brokers having charge of the rental of apartments of this character, that it was the best constructed building of its kind on Park Avenue. In consequence, before the building was completed in September, 1916, and in spite of the fact that America's entrance into the World War was by that time assured, nearly all of the apartments were leased to some of the wealthiest families in the city.

On June 23, 1916, Mr. Fischel entered upon a new real estate proposition, transferring his activities from Park to Fifth Avenue, where he purchased the famous mansion of Mr. Alfred Duane Pell at the corner of Seventy-fourth Street. On this site, in association with Mr. Joseph Ravitch, he erected another fine apartment house but before the structure was fully completed in 1917 the United States entered the war and it looked as though the undertaking would prove a failure.

Fortune was again with Mr. Fischel, however, and despite the predictions of many, the building, as soon as finished, was completely leased and has always remained a highly profitable investment.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### CORNERSTONE LAID FOR NEW HOME OF THE DAUGHTERS OF JACOB—HONORS TO A VENERABLE JEW COMPLETION OF CENTRAL JEWISH INSTITUTE

LARGELY as Mr. Fischel's time was occupied with war relief work and business undertakings in these years, this did not preclude a continuance of his interest in local communal affairs and participation in events connected with them.

On October 26, 1916, he was one of the committee which laid the cornerstone of the new building of the Home of the Daughters of Jacob, occupying the block on 167th Street from Findlay to Teller Avenues, the Bronx. When Mr. Fischel laid the cornerstone for the first building of this institution on October 6, 1907, at the corner of East Broadway and Scammel Street, he expressed the hope in his address as chairman of the Building Committee, that the time would come when the institution would grow to such size that it would occupy an entire block. That this prediction should have so soon come true filled him with unusual happiness.

It was in Mr. Fischel's residence, it will be remembered, that this institution for the care of dependent aged men and women saw its beginning in 1896, when Mrs. Fischel with six other women organized the Home and became its charter members. It was quite natural, therefore, that Mr. Fischel should always have taken an especial interest in its work and should have given a great deal of time, energy and money for its advancement, as he always considered it one of the worthiest among all the charitable institutions of the city.

During the same year the Central Jewish Institute was erected.



A PORTRAIT OF MRS. FISCHEL,  
*Who, among her countless other philanthropic activities, was one of the founders of the Home of the Daughters of Jacob.*



After the building had been constructed as far as the roof it was found necessary to suspend work because of the lack of funds. Mr. Fischel then came forward with a proposition to the president, the late Samuel I. Hyman, that if Mr. Hyman would get nine additional men to loan the institution \$3,000 each, Mr. Fischel would be the tenth, which would provide sufficient funds with which to insure the building's completion. Mr. Hyman accepted the proposition with the result that he procured nine men among the Board of Directors, each of whom loaned \$3,000. This, together with Mr. Fischel's loan, amounted to \$30,000, with which the structure was finished. The institute was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies on April 7, 1916.

In November of this same year, the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society decided to pay appropriate honors to the venerable American, Mr. Simon Wolf, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. Mr. Fischel was appointed chairman of the committee to arrange a dinner to Mr. Wolf, who had for many years been the representative of the Society in Washington and had had charge of all immigration cases requiring special official action by the government.

During his long period of service to the Society, Mr. Wolf had won the respect and confidence of many Presidents of the United States and Mr. Fischel felt highly honored at being designated to take charge of the arrangements for the testimonial.

The dinner took place at the Hotel Savoy, New York, on November 28, 1916. To Mr. Fischel was entrusted the task of presenting the guest of honor with a Bible, commemorative of the occasion. In making the presentation Mr. Fischel made the following remarks:

The other day the great statesman, Senator Chauncey M. Depew, made a statement that King David had created a feeling among all men that when a man has reached the age of 70 he is no longer useful to the world, and, therefore, those who believe in

King David's philosophy, when they reach the age of 70 lose interest in everything.

I am justified this evening in disagreeing with Senator Depew, because our guest of honor, Mr. Simon Wolf, is a striking illustration of the fact that some men over 70 are not alone active, but their acts are marked by that mature deliberation which age brings with it.

My opinion of the meaning of King David is, that after a man has reached the age of 70, and his years have been used only for his personal benefit and to satisfy his animal instincts, he is naturally bound to lose interest in the world, but when a man has reached the age of 70 but has spent very little of his time for personal benefit, and most of his life for the good of humanity, he is not old even at the age of 80 and there is no better witness to this fact than our beloved friend, Mr. Simon Wolf.

Now, Mr. Wolf, in behalf of our Committee of Arrangements of which I have the honor to be Chairman, I herewith present to you this Bible. It is our sincere wish, that just as the Bible, although thousands of years old, is still recognized by the entire world as the fount of wisdom, so too shall your name be perpetuated, not alone by the present generation but by many generations to come.

I therefore present to you, the man of men, the Book of Books and it is my earnest wish that you shall use this Bible for at least 20 years to come.

The Bible was accepted by Mr. Wolf with many expressions of his joy and appreciation.



MR. FISCHEL AT THE AGE OF FIFTY.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### PALESTINE AND THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

SINCE visiting Palestine with his daughter in 1910, Mr. Fischel had been more than ever interested in the hope of the Jews the world over to re-establish in that country a homeland which would be a haven for the oppressed of their faith of every nation and to which they might migrate in large numbers with the purpose of securing the right to self expression and self government.

Until the introduction in the British Parliament, on November 11, 1917, of the Balfour Declaration, the way toward this end had been beset with many difficulties and Mr. Fischel, up to this time, had felt that Palestine as a recreated Jewish homeland could not succeed. His reasons were that the majority of Jews who had migrated there had done so chiefly with the idea of dying on Holy ground and that charity alone was the foundation upon which the colonization plan was built.

So long as Palestine was under Turkish domination and rule the undertaking, Mr. Fischel believed, lacked the elements of business security, as investments were necessarily unsafe. With the Balfour Declaration, however, all this was changed. The opportunity for profitable enterprises, which Mr. Fischel had noted on his visit in 1910 and had commented upon in interviews on his return to America at that time, now needed, he was convinced, only capital for development.

Mr. Fischel believed that this was the time for the millions of Jewish people throughout the world to show their appreciation of the Balfour Declaration and its significance by investing a part of their savings in the project of the upbuilding of Palestine, which could be done with the assurance of the protection of the British government for such investments.

Accustomed to dealing in a big way with big projects, Mr. Fischel devoted considerable thought to the Palestine problem with the result that within less than a month after the Balfour Declaration had been made public, he evolved a plan for the financing of the development of Palestine, which, had it been carried into effect, would undoubtedly have met the entire needs of the situation for many years to come.

This plan was none other than the floating of a Jewish Liberty Loan of \$100,000,000 to be subscribed to by the Jews of America and Europe.

It so happened that at this time the Zionist Organization was holding its annual convention in Baltimore, presided over by United States Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, with whom Mr. Fischel had become well acquainted through their association in the work of organizing the American Jewish Relief Committee.

Mr. Fischel accordingly decided to take this opportunity to communicate his plan to Justice Brandeis, sending him the following letter, in which he submitted the full details of his proposal:

Hon. Louis D. Brandeis,  
Washington, D. C.

December 13, 1917.

My dear Judge:

I herewith enclose a copy of my plan for the proposal to float a Jewish Liberty Loan of \$100,000,000 for the development of Palestine. I have been informed that the Zionist Organization will meet in Baltimore and will no doubt take up some sort of financial proposition to help build Palestine. I therefore feel that this is the proper time to consider this plan. While the amount is large, there are, however, at least five million Jews the world over who can subscribe on the average of \$20 each for this purpose, and in order to make a beginning I pledge myself to subscribe the sum of \$10,000 in accordance with the suggestion made in my plan. I may increase this sum as the necessity arises.

Yours very truly,

HARRY FISCHEL.

The plan, as proposed by Mr. Fischel was as follows.

PLAN FOR \$100,000,000 LIBERTY LOAN ISSUE FOR THE PURPOSE  
OF UPBUILDING PALESTINE

The news covering the success of the English army in capturing Jerusalem and practically all of Judea, and the declaration that a Jewish State in Palestine is much favored, has naturally filled me with pride and satisfaction.

This is not an ordinary incident, and it carries with it the Finger of God. The event having taken place on the first day of Chanukah makes it particularly significant, because on that day, nearly two thousand years ago, the Maccabees entered the Temple.

Every Jew, proud of his tradition, must raise the question, what should be the next step? How should this historical event be celebrated? Shall it be by simply rejoicing in the same way as we have till now mourned the loss of Palestine. No progress was ever made merely with tears, therefore no progress will be obtained by simply rejoicing. It is our duty to do something practical and in a concrete form, to assure the proper development of this wonderful country of our forefathers, which was known to be abundant with milk and honey. Something will have to be done quickly in order to change the entire status of that country, as thousands upon thousands of people will be glad and eager to go there. Till now, most of our people went there to die, few went there to live; today the reverse must be the case, they must go there to live, and do their best for the development of that country.

I had the privilege of visiting a good portion of Palestine a few years ago. I came back enthused with the possibilities that our Holy Land affords development of industrial and commercial enterprises, to say nothing about the agricultural promise that it held out at that time, and which has naturally increased. The country has a vast amount of natural resources and therefore permits not alone of the exploitation of these resources but also the establishment of factories, using as a basis, copper, brass, coal, petroleum, asphalt and quite a number of chemicals that may be used for medicinal and other purposes. The Orient, apart from being attractive to tourists, also has

a number of places that permit of being turned into curative resorts. In short, everything that was done in the new colonies under the British domain, like Canada, Brazil, Australia, and later on in Egypt, it is possible to expect of Palestine. The stimulation of business, the construction of buildings, the reconstruction of towns requires a stupendous, yet easily obtainable fund.

Now that everybody is hopeful that a Jewish state in Palestine is no longer a dream, it is well "to make hay while the sun shines." Nothing can be done unless financial backing is secured, and everyone should be willing to give his share.

I am of the opinion that the time is at hand when a \$100,000,000 Liberty Loan can be floated and easily subscribed to by the Jews of America, and that such a loan should be underwritten by our leading Jewish bankers. In order to induce subscribers to make their subscriptions as large as possible, I would suggest that these subscriptions be made payable in five years, in installments of 20 per cent each year, because it would take fully that time before all the money subscribed would actually be required.

I feel that it is a great privilege to start this subscription with my pledge of a large sum on the plan above mentioned. I have every reason to believe that while the enthusiasm is great among all the Jews throughout the United States, it is worth while "To strike while the iron is hot" and let each one show his enthusiasm by the amount of bonds for which he is willing to subscribe. In this way many sympathizers will follow my suggestion, and I have no doubt that this loan of \$100,000,000 if properly handled, will be over-subscribed in a very short time.

The following from the New York Times is typical of the newspaper articles which followed this suggestion:

**\$100,000,000 LOAN BY JEWS URGED TO DEVELOP PALESTINE**

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**Harry Fischel Wants Issue of Hebrew Liberty Bonds—Pledges First \$10,000—Writes Plan to Justice Brandeis—Subscriptions to be Paid in Five Years**

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Harry Fischel, well known philanthropist and real estate man, has written to Justice Louis D. Brandeis, of the Supreme Court of the United States, suggesting that the Jews of America raise a Jewish Liberty Loan of \$100,000,000 for the rehabilitation of Palestine. Mr. Fischel is willing to subscribe \$10,000. Meetings at which the project will be discussed will be held in Baltimore today and tomorrow. (Here follows Mr. Fischel's plan in full.)

Immediately following publication of Mr. Fischel's suggestion he was in receipt of a large number of telegrams and letters from all parts of the United States inquiring where and how the Jewish Liberty Loan bonds might be purchased.

One telegram in particular, gave him much satisfaction. It was from Nathan Straus and read:

"I note with pleasure your plan of raising \$100,000,000 Liberty Loan for the upbuilding of Palestine. Your proposal to start the loan with \$10,000 and increase it later is very admirable. It shows that your heart is toward Palestine. May your example be followed by many of our Jewish people in subscribing to this worthy cause. Appreciating your generosity.

NATHAN STRAUS.

Had the Zionist Organization taken advantage of the large degree of enthusiasm among the Jewish people created by the Balfour Declaration and had it acted at this psychological time

when Mr. Fischel proposed the \$100,000,000 Loan, there can be little doubt but that a very large sum of money would have been subscribed by Jews in the United States and all over the world.

The imagination of the people was at this time fired by the capture of Jerusalem and the pledge of Great Britain for the establishment of a true Jewish homeland, for which the Jews had yearned for more than 2,000 years. It would have required relatively little effort to transform this enthusiasm into terms of money for Palestine's upbuilding, but the Zionist Organization, for reasons of its own, failed to act on Mr. Fischel's plan and the great opportunity was lost. It was inevitable that, as time went on, the enthusiasm should diminish and what might have been accomplished immediately after the Balfour Declaration could never again be duplicated, although many individuals have continued to make large personal sacrifices in order that the dream of the Jewish homeland should be realized.

While Mr. Fischel's hope for floating a great loan for this purpose was doomed to disappointment he continued to give a great deal of thought to the question of how he might raise money to support the industries of Palestine and thus give employment to the Jewish people there, so that they might be self-supporting and become producers.

It was his firm opinion, as a result of what he had personally observed while there, that with a stable government, money could be invested in Palestine with profit, and, at the same time could be made to accomplish results that would be of the largest benefit in helping to realize the greater object of upbuilding the country.

Mr. Fischel, with this idea in mind, on January 21, 1919, called a conference at his home, then at 118 East 93rd Street, at which he proposed the formation of a Palestine Development Corporation, the purpose of which was to initiate and to afford assistance to various Palestinian industries. The conference was attended by business men engaged in varied lines of activity, and a number of Rabbis.

At this meeting, Mr. Fischel advised the conferees they had been called together for the purpose of helping to upbuild Palestine. He had, he told them, informally discussed the problem with a number of men deeply interested in the future of the Holy Land, as a result of which conversations he was convinced the time was opportune for the formation of a large corporation which should engage in establishing the several industries essential to the welfare of the people.

This should be undertaken, he declared, not as a charity but strictly as a business proposition, and in such a manner that those who invested their moneys in the corporation should receive a profit.

Incidentally, the people already residing in Palestine, with those who should in the future migrate there, would, of course, be greatly aided through such a plan, Mr. Fischel stated, as it would mean that employment would be found for them. It would be especially beneficial to the Jews compelled, because of intolerable conditions, to leave Russia, Poland, Galicia, Roumania and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe.

The occasion was ripe for such a corporation, Mr. Fischel continued, inasmuch as American Jews were taking a larger interest in Palestine than formerly and were economically better situated than the Jews of any other country to invest in such an enterprise, despite the fact that there had already been formed a Palestine Development Corporation abroad, with many investors, notably in Russia. Surely, he contended, the Jews of this country would not wish to do less for Palestine than the Jews of Russia.

The fact that there was considerable doubt as to what the attitude of America would be toward immigration for a number of years after the war, Mr. Fischel pointed out, would place heavy demands upon Palestine as a land of Jewish refuge and made it extremely desirable to prepare for all future eventualities. In order to do this it was essential that the work in Palestine be thoroughly organized and systematized with the view,

first, of caring for the people already on the ground, and second, of preparing the land for those who might in the future be compelled or wish to settle there.

As a result of Mr. Fischel's representations the Palestine Development Corporation was formally organized with a capital of \$10,000,000 made up of 100,000 shares of stock of the par value of \$100 a share. At a subsequent meeting of the incorporators, held on February 5, 1919 at the Central Jewish Institute the following statement of the objects of the corporation was formulated and adopted:

"The object of the Corporation shall be the upbuilding of the Holy Land by the development of industries. This would include the raising, canning and exporting of fresh, dried and canned foods; the growing and manufacturing of cotton and wool; the growing of sugar cane; manufacturing and exporting of sugar; the raising of cattle; the sale of hides and leather; the manufacture of leather and leather goods; the sale of asphalts and other dead sea products; the refining of oils; the manufacture of perfumery and soaps; the development of olive wood and mother of pearl industries; the opening of the petroleum fields.

"The building of houses and factories, assisting capable and enterprising men who have knowledge of industry, but have not sufficient funds to enter into business on their own account, by supplying them with all necessary machinery and raw materials, upon such terms as they may live up to, and to take from them in payment thereof, their manufactured products for export purposes.

"Palestine being the junction of Europe, Asia and Africa, can and should be made the center of purchase, sale and exchange of products of the three continents, for example, its central position should make it the ideal market for furs that are exported from Persia, Smarkland and Turkastan, and likewise for the oriental rug industry."

While the formation of the Palestine Development Corporation was in progress, Mr. Fischel secured the opinions of many men regarded as experts in Far Eastern matters and who, with-

out exception, expressed the view that there was ample scope for such an undertaking, which should be exceedingly profitable.

Among such expressions was a letter received by Mr. Fischel from Dr. Otis A. Glazebrook, American Consul-General in Jerusalem. Dr. Glazebrook while in this country and just before his departure to Palestine to resume his diplomatic post, wrote Mr. Fischel as follows:

Mr. Harry Fischel,  
51 Chambers Street,  
New York, N. Y.

319 West 59th Street, New York, N. Y.  
February 14, 1919.

My dear Mr. Fischel:

I have read with great interest the prospectus of the Palestine Development Corporation. The proposition appeals to me in every particular as feasible. My acquaintance with Palestinian conditions and possibilities justifies the opinion that this enterprise philanthropically will be of great benefit to the unemployed and, I should think, if properly managed, it might prove a good investment.

As an American consular officer I hail with gratification the introduction of American industrial appliances in Palestine. It will be my duty and pleasure to foster in every way such undertakings.

Very faithfully yours,

(signed) OTIS A. GLAZEBROOK.

Mr. Fischel at this time retained as counsel to the corporation former Ambassador to Turkey, Abram I. Elkus, to whom was entrusted the task of conducting necessary negotiations with the British and American governments for obtaining the consent of both countries to the corporation's proposed activities. While the organization proceeded quietly, without publicity or propaganda of any kind, nearly a quarter of a million dollars was privately subscribed by those who had become interested in the enterprise.

With the situation affecting the corporation in this satisfactory condition, Mr. Fischel called upon Mr. Henry Morgenthau, former Ambassador to Turkey, who had just returned from Palestine and to whom he outlined his plans. Mr. Morgenthau, on the occasion of this meeting, discouraged the project but the following day called Mr. Fischel personally on the telephone and asked that he have tea with him at five o'clock that afternoon.

When Mr. Fischel arrived at Mr. Morgenthau's residence, he found the latter had changed his attitude toward the new corporation and was ready to give his assistance in every way possible. It was after this conference that Mr. Fischel authorized Mr. Elkus to complete the legal details involved, but, for some undivulged reason, Mr. Elkus did not proceed as fast as Mr. Fischel wished.

At this time, Mr. Fischel called on Federal Judge Julian W. Mack, then president of the Zionist Organization of America. While Judge Mack lent a great deal of encouragement to the plans, he nevertheless requested Mr. Fischel to delay further steps until after the conclusion of the drive of the Palestine Foundation Fund, just then in progress.

On the next Saturday night, while attending a dinner given by the Central Jewish Relief Committee in honor of the late Albert Lucas, secretary of the Joint Distribution Committee, Mr. Fischel met at the function Mr. Jacob H. Schiff, always an early attendant at affairs of this kind, and related to him the plans of the Palestine Development Corporation in detail. Mr. Schiff gave his entire approval to the project but suggested that Mr. Fischel meet him for another conference at his office before proceeding to obtain a charter for the corporation.

At this subsequent meeting, after Mr. Schiff and Mr. Fischel had discussed the matter from every angle, the former requested that the launching of the enterprise be postponed to a future time when, he said, conditions would be more favorable.

Following his talks with Mr. Schiff and other Jewish leaders who endorsed his idea but felt the time was not opportune for

it, Mr. Fischel decided to be guided by their advice and judgment and to delay further action until he might himself again visit Palestine and decide what might be done to provide a home there for the thousands of Jewish people denied the privilege, under the existing immigration laws of the United States, of making their abode in this land of freedom and opportunity.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### PURCHASES THE HOLLAND HOUSE

THE scarcity of labor during the war had greatly curtailed activity in the building industry, not alone seriously affecting housing conditions but creating a dearth of business accommodations as well.

With the signing of the Armistice there was great need for a resumption of activity in this field. Mr. Fischel, although he continued to devote a major part of his time to his communal and philanthropic interests, considered that it was not proper for one who had the ability to be a producer to remain idle at such a time and accordingly looked around for some enterprise which would utilize his experience and resources.

One of the old and famous landmarks of the city was the famous hotel known as the Holland House, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, where for nearly a generation many noted people had made their residence. This hotel, a ten story building erected in 1892, was one of the first strictly fireproof hostelries to be built in New York, and was of the highest class and most expensive type of construction. It was justly celebrated for its staircase of Carara marble, especially imported, and was also known for years as a favorite stopping place for couples on their honeymoons.

With the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, however, the Holland House, in common with many other hotels, came upon lean days, for a large part of its revenue had depended upon its bar, and now that liquor could no longer be legally dispensed it had been forced to go out of business as a hotel. The property was on the market for a long time but no one could be found who would chance operating it again for its original purpose and the building was too expen-



THE FAMOUS OLD HOLLAND HOUSE,  
*Fifth Avenue and 30th Street; for a generation, one  
of New York's leading hotels, converted  
by Mr. Fischel into an office building in 1919.*



sive and modern to be torn down with the object of erecting a new structure on the site.

Mr. Fischel, sensing an opportunity, decided the hotel could be profitably transformed into an office building.

Accordingly he purchased the Holland House in November 1919 at a very reasonable cost and by extensive alterations, which he himself planned and supervised, succeeded within a period of four months, in converting the hotel into a high class office building, practically all the space in which was rented before the alterations were completed.

The building having a very central and convenient location, Mr. Fischel arranged a suite of rooms for his own offices which he still maintains there. The transaction proved one of the most successful building operations of his entire career.

The four upper floors of the building were leased as the headquarters of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society. Shortly after this organization had been installed in the building, its general manager, Mr. Hutchinson, called on Mr. Fischel and put to him this question.

"How is it that the Jewish people do not engage in any missionary work in foreign fields?"

Mr. Hutchinson was apparently under the impression that the Jews could obtain converts from among the heathen more readily and economically than the Christians.

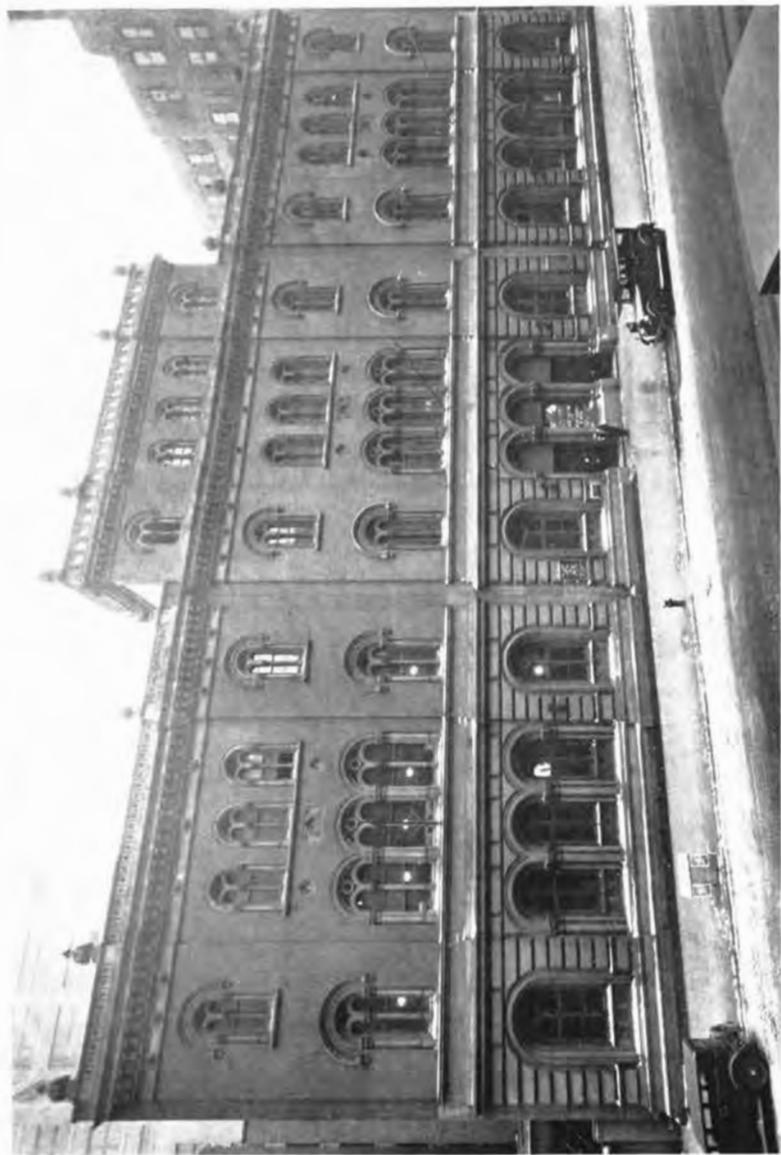
Mr. Fischel replied to him in this wise:

"Entirely apart from the financial aspect of the successful conduct of missionary work, in which it may be true that Jews might excel; from the religious standpoint, our Jewish law prohibits our attempting to convert anyone to Judaism. Indeed, we are instructed by law that should one of a different religion come to us voluntarily with the purpose of becoming a Jew, we should do everything in our power to dissuade him.

"We are instructed to exert every effort and expend all the money at our disposal for the purpose of giving religious instruc-

tion to our own people to acquaint them fully with our religion in order to have them remain as Jews.

“As to my own experience, I have always found that if a Jew becomes converted to the Christian religion, he must necessarily have been a bad Jew, else he would have remained true to his faith. Therefore, I do not feel that Christian missionaries who seek to convert Jews to their own beliefs are ever very successful in their undertaking and I believe that the money which is spent in this way cannot bring good results, even from the Christian point of view.”



**THE ASTOR LIBRARY.**

*A New York landmark at Lafayette Street near Astor Place, acquired by Mr. Fischel in 1919 as the Home of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America, and reconstructed by him, as Chairman of the Building Committee.*

