

THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY AND ITS PLACE IN THE MODERN WORLD

BY

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American Friends of the Hebrew University

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by

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THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM, projected long before the last war, was founded in 1918 and formally inaugurated in 1925. It consisted at that time of a small number of isolated research institutes in medicine, chemistry and Jewish studies. In 1928 the framework of a faculty of Arts was erected and undergraduate teaching begun. The first ordinary degrees in Arts were given in 1931, in Science in 1935; the first research degree in 1936. Before the great depletion caused by the cessation of immigration and by voluntary enlistment for the war the number of undergraduates had risen to about 1,200, the number of research students to about 75. The two or three isolated professors of twenty years are now an organized staff of, all told, 159, of which about 90 are of permanent grade. There are fairly complete faculties of arts and science, and a first beginning of a faculty of agriculture, the first germ of a faculty of law, and the research and graduate foundations upon which it is hoped to build, immediately after the war, an undergraduate faculty of medicine. All this activity centres round the first building acquired for the University, the country house of a Liverpool solicitor. This house, a deserted ruin during the last war and the remembered scene of a celebration held by the London Scottish on the eve of Allenby's last push, has by now been rebuilt so often as to be past recognition, and it is to-day only one of a whole group of new buildings surrounded by trees and gardens which crown the spur of the Mount of Olives called by the name of Scopus (the Beacon or Watchtower), with its well-known view over the city of Jerusalem on the one side and the Dead Sea on the other.

This brief sketch of a twenty years' rapid and continuous growth could be filled out indefinitely, but I do not propose to weary you with detail. Nor do I wish to delay you with an account of our internal organization. Our University, like any other, is an intricate machine, and its various parts are only heard of when they work badly. On the whole the University works well. The staff, the students, the administration, the technical services, are all striving, to the best of their understanding, to the one end; and that end is the end of all Universities throughout the world, the conser-

vation and advancement of knowledge through creative thinking. Visitors from other Universities who come to us (and there have been many such recently) feel at home. They see the tools with which we work — our laboratories and library; they come in touch with the human material we are endeavouring to fashion — our students and young scientific workers; they join with us in lecturing or research activities, and they declare themselves satisfied. And just as visitors from other Universities feel themselves at home with us in Jerusalem, so we are made to feel at home when visiting Universities abroad. Our University has a good name. Its visiting card is accepted. Any traveller is met with numerous enquiries about this, that or the other, member of our staff whose work has become known through books and learned journals. The recent exigencies of the war earned us particular recognition because we were enabled to render services to the Allied forces which only a University could give: witness the large number of army doctors who received training in sub-tropical medicine and the treatment of wounds in our medical research centre; witness the special work of our chemistry and physics laboratories, the special employment of individual members of our staff, the linguistic and technical services performed by many of our students; witness the Scientific Advisory Council set up by the Government in order to co-ordinate scientific resources in the Near East, under the chairmanship of the President of the University. We may I think take it for granted that the University has established itself as a serious institution of higher learning, able and willing to provide, as yet possibly only on a modest scale but within that scale adequately, the trained intelligence and technical knowledge required by the business of living and dying in this all too troubled world.

And yet one often asks oneself: why just *there*? *A University in Jerusalem* — is there not something paradoxical in the very juxtaposition of these two terms? A University—the new knowledge of the West—in Jerusalem, the city of David, the holy city of the East? Profane and sacred, matter and spirit, science and religion; on the one side the eternal, on the other the destructive scurrying of modernity — do not all these antitheses leap to

the mind and cry: stay. And *Hebrew* — what has Hebrew to do with the twentieth century and in particular with the *science* of the twentieth century? Hebrew means the Bible, Isaiah, and the Psalmist; it means divinity and schools of theology. At the worst a scholastic ornament, at the best it connotes things remote, intangible; it is the tongue of angels, not of men. I am reminded of a young Palestinian girl who on a visit to England was asked by a charming old lady where she had been born. When she replied: 'in Jerusalem', she was met with the horrified exclamation: 'What sacrilege!' I often sense a similar disapproval when I confess to being on the staff of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

And yet the University is there, in Jerusalem, on the Beacon hill, and we hope to make that hill a beacon; and we are as definitely Hebrew as we are definitely in Jerusalem and as we are definitely a University. One of my purposes here to-day is to examine with you why this should be; why we should have a University at all, and why Jerusalem is just the place for it, and why Hebrew is just the language for it; why in fact, if there had not been a Hebrew University of Jerusalem already in existence, we should be urging ourselves here and now, to found one.

And I use the word *University* advisedly. Here is no Rabbinical seminary or theological college, although Jewish learning in all its branches finds us with supreme recognition. It is a University in the normal sense, an institution of higher learning in which the sciences and the arts are handed on to the coming generation; where the spirit of disinterested enquiry is furthered; where the primary tools of thought are given by precept and example, and where youthful enthusiasms disciplined by knowledge, are forged into permanent tastes.

It is in this sense that I am speaking of a University in Jerusalem, in this wide and true sense in which Universities are founded and fostered all over the world; and again I ask: Why Hebrew and why in Jerusalem; and why a University at all?

We may start with the simplest prose. There exists now a self-dependent

Jewish Palestine of well over half a million souls. This body has certain needs, and those needs can only be met by the type of institution of higher learning called a University. Like every other country; it needs trained men of its own to be its teachers, its doctors, its technicians, its thinkers, its leaders, its public servants. Its language requires cultivation; the lessons of its past require study and diffusion; its culture and commerce, its agriculture and industries, its communal and municipal institutions, require understanding and development; and for all this there are needed a succession of men and women, *trained* men and women; and such training is possible only in a permanent teaching centre where the best of human experience is assembled and fostered, that is, in a University.

A most heartening thing about our University is that, in this sense, it is already fulfilling its mission. I think we may fairly claim that there are very few activities of the type I have indicated which do not already centre around the University, or are not becoming, in some way or other, connected with the University and University men. For example, a glance at the list of the various Palestinian learned and scientific organizations devoted to the needs of the country, whether the language academy, the physicians' association, the archeological society, the people's institute, the society of chemists, the historical, the botanical society — a glance at the membership lists of these and similar organizations shows that they are commonly headed, and largely manned, by members of the University staff and by former students of the University. Public committees and advisory bodies, both regular and special, are seldom without members from the University, and the case is similar with most voluntary private organizations too. Of the books which are published — and I refer not only to the more learned sort — an appreciable percentage come from the University circle. A whole net-work of adult education, comprising both single and complete courses of lectures in every corner of the country, has been built up by the University, and refresher courses in the arts and sciences, as well as in medicine and education, are given inside the University itself. Water problems are referred naturally to the University

geologist, cases of cattle and fowl diseases to the University parasitologist, Dead Sea problems to the University chemists, in much the same way as philological questions are referred to our language departments and new finds to our archeologists. In a word, the University is becoming the cultural and scientific centre of Jewish Palestine.

And the tendency is increasing; indeed, it is bound to increase, and that through our students: our students are entering, and slowly filling, every walk of life in which trained intelligence is required. Nor let us forget the teaching profession. The teachers in our schools are being increasingly enlisted from the graduates of the University, and through them the influence of the University is penetrating into the very heart of the country, into its future citizens.

I have been speaking till now of the University in 'Jewish Palestine' but I feel considerable awkwardness in the phrase. Countries are wholes; and as you cannot raise the *health* level of any one part of a country without affecting it in every other part, so you cannot raise the *cultural* level in any one part of a country without in some way affecting the whole. The University is a general centre for the study and diffusion of modern knowledge and new methods; and this knowledge and these methods have been used with benefit not by and for one part alone of the country but by and for all of it. Its very existence has constituted a challenge, and slowly suspicion is being allayed and the desire has been stimulated for emulation. This is all to the good, and to my mind constitutes an essential service the importance of which cannot be over-estimated. It is not only, for example, that our advance malaria station in the far north of the country is in an almost purely non-Jewish section; or that our published word-list of basic Arabic was used in two great Universities in the United States for the rapid training of Arabic interpreters for the Near East; or that our libraries and collections are consulted by the whole of the country, and indeed by neighbouring countries too, just as the health services of the Hadassah-University hospital are open to all alike. The fundamentally significant thing is that so far as Palestine and the Near East

is concerned, the University has set a new standard. We have shown what can be done not only in the applied fields of agriculture and public health, but in the general fields of education and learning.

True, the neighbouring peoples have as yet no complete or fully integrated educational system; they have as yet few men of their own fitted to staff their Universities. But the first steps are being taken, and our University has been both consulted by Universities from neighbouring countries as to the organization of their work, and held up as a model to them by friendly critics. Young doctors from Beirut walk the Hadassah-University hospital just as young research workers from Egypt have inscribed themselves among our research students, and a recent volume on the revival of *Arab* culture advised a following of the precedent set, and the method adopted, by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for Hebrew. I come to a consideration of the use of Hebrew in the University. Against this use there have been advanced two objections, the one that Hebrew *can* not be used for the purposes of modern thought, the other that it *should* not. The first objection touches on a point of fact, the second on a point of principle.

On the point of fact the answer is clear. It has been amply demonstrated that Hebrew can be used, and that not for the purposes of elementary and secondary education only but for those of University education too. The publications of the University Press (and our Press is not the only one publishing learned books in modern Palestine) are in this respect conclusive. Works on medicine, mathematics, and the theory of knowledge, stand on its shelves side by side with volumes on Bible and Jewish history and antiquities. We are publishing now an annotated translation of the Homeric Hymns prepared by one of our graduates, a companion volume to a verse translation of the Odyssey, made by a member of our Board of Governors, published by us a couple of years ago; while a series of philosophical classics in Hebrew has given our students the masterpieces of European thought from Plato and Aristotle to Mill and Bertrand Russell. It goes without saying that all ordinary lectures in the University are given

in Hebrew, and it is gratifying to observe how natural this soon becomes even to those of our staff and students who were not brought up to it.

A more serious question is that of principle: *ought* we to have a Hebrew University? Is there not a sufficient babel of tongues in the world already without adding another, and does not every new one cause fresh confusion? This objection would be valid if Hebrew were a new creation. It is not. It has been used continuously for literary purposes in every country and in every age; and any normal Hebrew library contains books of all kinds and on most subjects (including the science of the day) produced in any one of the past twenty centuries. The miracle of our time is not that the *scholar* knows and uses Hebrew — he always did, and there has always been a large educated laity in Jewry. The miracle is that *now* Hebrew is known and used by the plumber and the chauffeur, the ploughman and the artizan.

But the modern miracle is nothing compared with the ancient miracle, the miracle of the classical language itself. One does not need to quote Renan on its intense vitality; it is one of the great languages of the world. And when the history of modern Palestine and the University is written, it may well be the use of the Hebrew language which will stand out as one of the great spiritual sources of whatever we may contribute to human culture. We are all fond of talking of Greece and Israel as the roots of what is good in modern life. Could that be expressed more clearly than by the teaching in our University of Plato in the tongue of Isaiah? Hebrew is not only the lingua franca of Jewry, the only language on the use of which all Jews can agree. It is in itself an inspiration, a call to better things. It is the linguistic side of the cry for a new Jerusalem.

The new Jerusalem may find its inspiration in language but it will only be built by human beings. What is the human material at our disposal? Whence is it derived, and has it any special significance for the future development of the University?

The University is open to members of all races and creeds, and our walls

have looked down often on a strange mixture. But the vast majority of our students are, and no doubt will remain, Jews; we are not only a Hebrew, but a Jewish, University. It is worth pausing to consider the further implications of this fact.

The most important implication is that we are not solely Palestinian. It is indeed right that Jewish Palestine should have a University of its own, and it is right that the University should serve Palestine and the neighbouring countries. But just as Palestine itself, although a local geographical entity, has a more than local significance, so the University, although situated in Palestine, is the centre of more than the Jews of Palestine. It is the centre of Jewish education and culture throughout the entire world.

I can perhaps best explain this conception here by saying that the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is the Oxford and Cambridge of world Jewry. The older Universities in England are more than the Universities of a county or a province (though they are that too;) they are more even than the Universities of the country as a whole, of England and the British Isles. They are the centre of the British Commonwealth of Nations, indeed of the whole English speaking world. They receive the intellectual life-stream *from* the most distant limb, send the intellectual life-stream *to* the most distant limb, of the vast body of Anglo-Saxondom. They are the heart of Englishry and sustain the whole. In the same way our University is out only the University of Jewish Palestine. It is the University of the whole wide-flung body of Jewry.

And this too is now being slowly fulfilled. The poetry is being vitalized in prose. Our graduates, slowly, are penetrating into the diaspora as teachers, and we are constantly being asked to increase the supply. Plans are maturing whereby students from existing Jewish colleges and seminaries elsewhere should spend a portion of their regular years of study with us, taking eventually a kind of combination degree. Apart from this, arrangements are being made for the provision of special courses for visitors, and there is discussion of organising summer pilgrimages for the youth. Our books

are becoming part of the mental food of the growing Hebrew reading groups all over the world, our learned productions standard among scholars. I am not saying that we are supplanting, or wish to supplant, existing institutions. On the contrary. We wish to strengthen them and be strengthened by them. Such as survive this war must be encouraged to continue, and new ones must be founded. But they will all turn their eyes to Scopus, the temple of learning in Zion, giving to it, taking from it, in a two-way stream.

But why to Scopus? Why to the University of Jerusalem? What can we give that is not given elsewhere? What is unique and peculiar to us? I have said something about the language and the people of the University. May I say a word on its physical site? What are the thoughts that stir one as one stands on the Beacon Hill and sees the city of Jerusalem on the one side, and on the other that strange, arid, vertebrous-like waste with the Dead Sea in its depths and the sentinel hills of Moab as its boundary.

"He is come to Aiath, he is passed through Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his baggage; they are gone over the pass, they have taken up their lodging at Geba, Ramah kembleth; Gibeah of Saul is fled. Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim! Hearken, O Laish! O thou poor Anathoth! Madmenah is a fugitive; the inhabitants of Gebim give themselves to flee. This very day he is to stand in Nob; he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." It is the itinerary of Sennacherib as described by Isaiah, and the learned point to these very villages, still known by the same names, as they look out from our library roof. "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth": *there* is Anathoth ("poor Anathoth") just at our feet, a short walk away. Scopus is the spot from which, according to the ancient authorities, the colours of the priests' robes as they stood in the Temple could be distinguished by the naked eye; Scopus is the hill from which, so the historians tell us, Titus directed the attack on Jerusalem. The old Jew was commanded to rend his garments as he looked on the ruins of Jerusalem; and from which point (we are told) should he rend them?

When he reaches Scopus! What memories! Has Paris or Bologna or Montpellier, has Oxford or Harvard, memories such as these? What memories; and what a stimulus, a stimulus to rebuild.

And the contrasts! As we stand on Scopus we seem on the very edge of civilisation, almost on the very edge of life itself. Put out your finger from the back of our open-air theatre and you put it into mere nothingness. Turn away and you are among the University's buildings and trees. This too — is it not a symbol, a symbol of redemption, of regeneration, of rebirth?

And the whole land — Palestine — it remains, as ever before, the meeting place of faiths and civilisations. Indeed, now more, perhaps, than ever before, it would seem to be assuming an even profounder destiny. Once the end terminal of civilisation when civilisation seemed to be bounded by the Mediterranean, it would appear now, with the emergence of the peoples of Asia and Africa, to be becoming the starting point for the world adventure of the future. What a natural seat for a revised and more complete League of Nations; and what more ennobling seat for a University!

In the meanwhile (to return to the prose of the situation) there are two groups of subjects for the study of which Jerusalem is specially fitted; and on these subjects the University has lavished great care, assembling for them facilities which might fairly be called unique. I refer to Jewish studies, and to Arabic and general Oriental studies; and for each of them there has been established in the University a special institute.

The Institute of Jewish Studies, opened in 1924, is devoted to all branches of enquiry relating to Judaism and Jewry:— Bible, Talmud, Jewish history and Literature in all its periods, Jewish Thought, both on its rationalistic and its mystical side, the Hebrew language, Biblical Botany and Archeology, and Palestine. The Institute of Oriental Studies comprises Arabic Art and Archeology, Arabic language and Literature, Comparative Semitic Philology (and with it the languages of the ancient and modern neighbouring peoples from Coptic and Amharic to Persian and Assyrian)

and all the various epochs and facets of Arabic history and religion. Both these institutes have their own libraries and collections, and both of them have close associations with members of the staff in other departments, many of whom are keenly interested and intimately involved in the subjects taught in these Institutes — I may mention the archeologists and their work for Bible and Jewish and Arabic Antiquities; the medievalists and their work on Jewish medieval disputations and dialects; the general philosophers and their work on medieval and modern Jewish and Arabic thought; the classical department with its authorities on Jewish epigraphy and the history of the Graeco-Roman period; the geologists and the meteorologist and the geographer, the entomologists and botanists, with their authoritative knowledge of the fauna and flora and the physical characteristics of Palestine. I think it is no exaggeration to say that on these all important subjects, vitally connected with the whole historical past and, it is to be hoped, fruitful future of the people and the language and the land, there is assembled in the University a depth and range of knowledge hardly found elsewhere. If any seat of learning would seem fated to constitute a bridge between past and present, between East and West, that would seem to be our University in Jerusalem, and I submit that the work done in this direction during these past twenty years is a happy augury for the future.

It is easy to see that the historical associations and present environment of Palestine can offer much to Jewish and Oriental studies; but it is seldom realised that the *physical* characteristics of the country constitute special facilities for certain of the observational sciences as well. A short car ride from Jerusalem offers such a variety of soil, of climate, of vegetation, as to make the country a veritable museum for the geologist, the entomologist and the botanist, and our students can see easily in situations what elsewhere they could only study behind glass cases. It is part of our hope that this facility of direct contact with the infinite variety of nature may help to transform the outlook of our students, and through them the country's youth; and here in particular, it seems to me, the University has much to

give for the building up of the character of the coming generation. I say nothing about the economic side of the country's problems and the planned Department of Administration in the University, though here too experts are inclined to stress the point I have advanced in other connections, the central position of Palestine in the Near East and its function as entrepot. Nor should one forget the variety of social structure it presents. This small country in fact would seem to contain all the elements required for a school of economics and political science. We are accustomed to think of it as a museum too exclusively. It is also an experimental sociological laboratory. And yet, for all that, what place is there here for Hebrew? Its special relation to Jewish and Oriental subjects may be taken as acknowledged, but what of social studies or the exact and experimental sciences? Do we really think the world will learn Hebrew in order to acquire the results of the work of, say, our physicists and chemists? A cynic might hazard the answer that there are few scientists anywhere who write in any known or knowable language, whether Hebrew or English or any other. A more sober reply would be that science is by its very nature supra-linguistic and is hardly dependent for its expression on language at all. My own answer would be slightly different, and it applies to the whole gamut of modern studies. I should say that the important thing is not that a Hebrew treatise on chemistry or economics should be read at Oxford or Harvard in Hebrew (any real discovery will be published of course in a world language too). The important thing is that the writer of the treatise should have been trained in Hebrew literature and Jewish thought, and brought up in the historic environment of Palestine. What this can give we do not know yet but we dare hope it can give much, not perhaps to the chemistry but to the man; and even chemists are men.

This, I should say, constitutes the primary and simple claim for the University and fixes its place in the modern world. It represents the desire of Jews to serve humanity as Jews, and it offers them the highest opportunity for doing so. Men give their best in their own natural company and when among their own. Our nationalism means just this, the desire

to be ourselves and to work for and among mankind as ourselves. But behind this desire lies the hope that the replanted Jewish spirit might have something fresh to contribute to the common store.

The notable thing about the Jewish people, it seems to me, is not that it has survived. All ancient peoples, in some sense, survive. Descendants of the Pharaohs parade the streets of Cairo to-day as do the far kin of Pericles the streets of Athens, and it was no error on the part of Mussolini to assure his people that they were the children of imperial Rome. But the Jewish people has not only survived *quantitatively*. It has survived *qualitatively*. It has given humanity continuously, throughout its long history, men and women who have created new things and new ways of thinking and new forms of life, and so helped mankind to live more fully and more wisely. The succession is a long one. It must not be broken. Ultimately that is our justification. The University exists in order to save the Jewish mind.

I need not stress the obvious truth that the Jewish mind is not an abstract entity. In that sense there *is* no 'Jewish mind'. The Jewish mind is the mind of Jews, and in these sad days we are all thinking how to preserve the remnant that is left. What has the University done in order to save Jews?

And here again the prose of the situation comes in to re-inforce, and give fresh meaning to, the poetry. There are on the staff of the University at the present time no fewer than thirty refugees in the technical sense of the term, that is, men expelled from regular posts in institutions of higher learning as the result of anti-Jewish legislation. I do not say we have done all that can be done or that could have been done, and of course other Universities have done magnificently. But there are none which have done better; and we are not a rich institution, nor are we, comparatively, a large one.

And here too, as ever, the special character of our University acquires peculiar significance. A Jew, even a Jewish professor, is not a stranger

among us. In the Hebrew University, as in Palestine as a whole, the refugees are no longer refugees.

I go back to my starting point. The enemies of civilisation have paid Jews the compliment of crowning as Jewish the spiritual values of mankind. Democracy, religion, ethics, those great creations no less wonderful, though perhaps less tangible, than engines of destruction, have been declared to be ours. We would not, perhaps, have made the claim ourselves but it has been made on our behalf; and as an accusation. That accusation we accept, and accept proudly.

But does not the very acceptance constitute a challenge? Are we really satisfied with the world as it is? And dare we not hope that the people which has given so much in the past and suffered so much in the present can help in the work of reconstruction for the future?

I am often asked what guarantee we have that the Hebrew University will survive. I *have* no guarantee. I can produce no documents, no illustrious signatures, can point to no charter or international bond. The fact is that the University did not spring from such things and so does not depend on such things. It was not artificially planned and then imposed from above. It came from below, from some profound urge deep down both in Jewry and in Judaism.

Too much stress should not be made of historical precedent, and I mention only in passing the schemes for a Jewish 'studium generale' (i.e. university) which were projected more than once in various states of Italy and Sicily during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I mention only in passing the learned academies for Jewish knowledge maintained in every country of the Jewish dispersion from the days of Ezra the scribe to our own; nor need I speak of the noble record held by Jews for many centuries in the advancement of science and learning. The fact is that from the very first Judaism was never a secret doctrine, its message was from the very first ordained to be taught in public; and although, like all religions, it is rooted in faith, it always rejected a faith which is blind. David's charge to

Solomon: 'Know the God of thy fathers,' only repeats the familiar precept: 'and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' Education for Jews became a religious duty incumbent on all alike, on the child to learn, on the teacher to teach, and on the father to see that his children be taught. This age-long reverence for learning is the real guarantee for the permanence of the Hebrew University. Our history has meant schools, academies, colleges, all of them — for us — fragmentary, partial, incomplete, satisfactions of the passionate groping for knowledge which has alone illumined the dark struggles of Jewry. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem will live because in it this passion finds its home. It lies now with us to see that the University is made worthy.



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