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When Myer S. Isaacs was born—it was on May 8, 1841—New York was still in its youth, and needed the stirring days of the Civil War to develop it into manhood. Its life was outwardly as quiet and sluggish as the sleepy omnibuses that slowly rolled through its streets. It was practically a town compared with the magnificent metropolis of half a century later; yet in that city which numbered about three hundred thousand souls there were men who foresaw its future growth and importance.

As a child Myer S. Isaacs was fortunate in a father's prescience and training. The Reverend Samuel M. Isaacs was called to New York, in 1839, as minister of the B'nai Jeshurun Congregation, and his eldest son was born in Elm Street, not far from the synagogue. There was an atmosphere of preparation in the modest God-fearing household, and that son received his parents' special care. The father knew what pressing problems were to be solved by the coming generation, and with love, strength, and self-sacrifice labored in his home to do his duty, by teaching the teachers and educating for the future the young intrusted to his charge. The eldest son received a full measure of parental guidance, and the labor was lightened by his studious disposition and the love of learning which made the acquisition of Hebrew and secular knowledge a comparatively easy task.

The school days quickly passed, and as rapidly his college experience. In 1855, he entered the New York University, whose Gothic building on Washington Square was one of the sights of the city, and he was graduated as valedictorian after a brilliant course, in 1859. His graduating address was on "Italy," and his allusion to Edgar Mortara, a name then fresh in all minds, evoked a storm of applause. It seemed prophetic of his attitude throughout his career—this chivalrous championship of Israel's cause and vindication of Israel's ideals.

During his college days, when he was only sixteen, he assisted his father in editing *The Jewish Messenger,* founded in 1857, and he assumed a large share in its supervision for many years, retiring from active control in 1872, although continuing to be a valued contributor. His early work showed much mature thought, and grew rapidly in strength and directness. Many plans in New York Israel that were adopted in the years following, were here outlined with masterly skill; and suggestions in the sphere of education and benevolence, in training the immigrant and developing American Judaism along the lines of the best American denominations, were to be realized in movements and institutions that have happily survived the tests of the experimental stage, so eminently practical and far-sighted was his mind, even in the early years of his manhood.

After his graduation from the New York University, he attended its Law School, and was graduated therefrom at the head of his class, in 1861. A year of practical study was next spent in the office of J. H. and S. Riker, prominent lawyers of that day, and a year later he commenced the practice of his profession. He quickly rose to prominence as a skilful

conveyancer, although he did not limit himself to any special branch of law. In 1866, he associated himself with his life-long friend, Adolph L. Sanger, and in 1870 with his brother, and the three continued together until Mr. Sanger's lamented death in 1894. In later years his two sons were added to the firm of M. S. and I. S. Isaacs. He was indefatigable in his work, and active up to the time of his death. But an hour before he passed away he was consulting with clients and dictating correspondence.

For ten years, from 1887 to 1897, he was one of the lecturers in the Law School of the New York University, and his course devoted to real estate law, so clear, practical, and comprehensive, was a favorite with the students. In the Lawyers' Title Insurance Company, he was one of the Special Committee of Counsel since its organization in 1887, passing upon the intricate legal questions that were submitted to the company for decision. His connection with this committee was highly prized by his associates, as appears by this extract from the memorial tribute: "He contributed to the determination of every question, submitted all the aid which an experience so wide that its limits were rarely attained, and a legal knowledge which seldom was incapable of giving light to those of us who had been in darkness, could impart."

For over thirty years he was a member of the New York Bar Association, and for a time one of its Executive Committee; he was also a member of the State Bar Association and of the American Bar Association. From 1886 to 1890 he was Vice-President of the New York Real Estate Exchange, and in the Republican and City Clubs he was for many years a prominent member. In the year 1873, he became a useful member of the Municipal Society, which did so

much to improve city affairs in the years following the revelation of the ring iniquities. In 1884, in the vigorous contest made by non-partisan bodies to oppose the inroads of the dominant party, he formed one of the "Committee of Fifty-three," to propose reform legislation. Mayor Strong later appointed him on the committee to locate and establish small parks in the crowded quarters, and he was largely instrumental in securing the opening of Seward Park in the East Broadway and Hester Street section adjoining the Educational Alliance.

In 1880, Governor Cornell appointed him to fill a vacancy on the Bench of the Marine Court, now the City Court of New York City, and he was that year the Republican candidate for election to the full judicial term. He was also the Republican candidate for Judge of the Superior Court in 1890, and of the Supreme Court in 1895. His party was unsuccessful in these three campaigns, but his name appeared first in the list of contestants, and his vote was largely ahead of that of his associates.

For several years he closely watched State legislation, in his capacity as counsel of the Lawyers' Title Insurance Company, and on the one hand aided in defeating many bills which, if enacted into laws, would have hindered the cause of legal progress, and on the other hand was largely instrumental in securing the passage of measures that have been found highly beneficial to the community. This was no small service to render the public, and his legal brethren recognized the debt they owed him as a representative lawyer, anxious to aid in the improvement of law and order.

That from his youth to his last hour Myer S. Isaacs should have been warmly interested in the welfare of the Jewish population, was not surprising to those who knew his domestic

surroundings. From his earliest days he had seen before him, in his home, a noble life devoted to others, and, inspired by his father's rare love of humanity, he in his own conduct and by his own endeavors exemplified the highest type of altruism.

He was secretary of his father's synagogue from 1857 until his marriage in 1869, and during the many years of his membership he strove to aid the officers of the congregation in their efforts to make it true to conservative Judaism, and a leader of movements of public interest. In 1869, representing the same congregation, he was active, with other members, in establishing the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, was its secretary for seven years, and its president until, in 1880, it was superseded by the Committee on Civil and Religious Rights of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. In behalf of the Board of Delegates, he was prompt to press the claims of the Jew for equal social, civil, and religious rights. The files of the Department of State at Washington will show how often he and his associates interposed to prevent wrong-doing. His first bold expression of opinion was in protesting against General B. F. Butler's censure of the Jews in 1861, and the press of the time widely published his warm letter and the General's manly apology. The occasions whereon he felt called upon to defend his people and his religion from unjust discrimination on the part of the press, the pulpit, or the lecture platform, were unfortunately numerous, but he never hesitated to write plainly his protest against abuse or misconception. His last public work in defending his persecuted brethren was in 1903, when he co-operated with several prominent friends in arranging for a mass-meeting at Carnegie Hall, to protest against the Russian massacres, and in counselling the preparation of the address to our

Government that resulted in the President's manly despatch to Russia. It will be recalled that this meeting was conducted on similar lines to the great assemblage in 1882 at Chickering Hall, over which Secretary Evarts presided, and at which notably forceful addresses were made in condemnation of Russian persecution. At both these meetings the main work was that of organization, and in arranging the two movements and securing their successful issue, the subject of this sketch was prominent.

In 1868, he joined with his father and others in establishing the Hebrew Free School Association, as a protest against the machinations of the missionaries, and to give the poor of the community a good training in Hebrew and in the knowledge of Judaism. He was its secretary in 1864, and its president from 1880 until 1892, when it merged into the Educational Alliance. In 1873 he initiated a movement for uniting the Relief Societies that were overlapping each other in performing their task of improving the condition of the Jewish poor, and the plan for the federation of such societies and the establishment of United Hebrew Charities was prepared by him.

In 1882, when the Russian persecution became intense, and the immigrants, by their number and needy condition, taxed to the utmost the time and money of the leaders of the local community, he was one of the New York Committee to aid the refugees, and he was identified with the temporary organization, until in 1891 the Baron de Hirsch Fund was formed, and he became its president, remaining at the head of this important organization until his death. In this responsible position he was indefatigable in providing for the material and moral needs of the immigrant. He was always hopeful

that the best results would follow from this benevolent legacy of Baron de Hirsch, was never dismayed by the mistakes that were inevitable, and his last week in life was made happy by his visit to the farming settlement at Woodbine, New Jersey, where he found much to encourage him and his colleagues.

Since the formation of this Fund he devoted all his spare time to its important enterprises; in fact, he deprived himself of the leisure to which his advancing years entitled him, in order to give special attention to the requirements of the work. His associates appreciated the energy, enthusiasm, and unselfishness with which he performed the many duties of the trust he had assumed as a labor of love, and when the future historian comes to treat of the origin and influence of this admirable corporation, the wise administration of its first president will be duly recorded.

Another charitable enterprise to which he gave much time and thought was the merging of three important societies into the Educational Alliance. The result of this combination of educational movements was the erection of the "Hebrew Institute," as it was first called, which has done so much to aid the immigrant residents of the Lower East Side. In the course of an appreciative address at the memorial exercises held in the fall of 1904, Judge Samuel Greenbaum, himself one of the founders of the Alliance, speaking of the difficulties that had to be overcome in raising the large sum necessary to make this noble institution a permanent addition to New York's memorable buildings, added this tribute: "The situation required tact, patience, and perseverance, and I can confidently assert that without the active aid, wise counsel, and disinterested services of Myer S. Isaacs, the Educational Alliance might never have become a reality."

He was among the founders of the Hebrew Technical Institute, that pioneer of advanced methods in instruction which has done so much to induce our young men to enter upon mechanical pursuits and reach a high standard of merit and success, and he was also among the projectors and first managers of the Montefiore Home for Chronic Invalids, a benevolent society, which, in commemorating the centenary of Israel's philanthropist, gave to the world a needed object-lesson of true charity, which knows no sectarian line in aiding suffering.

Finally, without specifying other movements in which he bore part—and the communal history of the past fifty years will testify to their number—he was one of the founders, in 1861, and for a time the president, of the Purim Association, a well-remembered organization of young men who desired to celebrate the Purim Festival in a refined way, which should fittingly represent the social side of New York Judaism, and enable the citizens without distinction of creed to enjoy annual entertainments that were a protest against extravagance and impropriety in public amusements, and which by their successful financial management contributed largely to the charities of the city. This was his pride throughout his useful career—to be a Jew respected for his American spirit, a citizen of the land, whose Judaism served to strengthen him in the esteem of his neighbors and the public.

His private life was pure and unsullied. Wedded in 1869 to Maria, a daughter of an old and well-known New Yorker, Barnet L. Solomon, for twenty years his married life was blissful and unclouded, and when it was ended by the death of his wife, there were six children to make his home cheerful, to emulate their mother's good deeds, and, inspired by both of their parents, to do their share in helping humanity.

Meeting all the exacting demands of professional life with ability and success; alive to pressing municipal and national questions of his time, to which he devoted a large amount of thought and activity; in the decades passed in intelligent pioneer work and direction in connection with Jewish educational and communal problems and the uplifting of the immigrant, he found leisure from time to time to address various organizations upon subjects partly critical and partly historical, but always inspired by genuine enthusiasm and adequate knowledge. The product of the years of ripest maturity, they indicate accurately his ultimate viewpoint on matters of vital import to the American Israelite, and are the earnest message of one who was worker as well as thinker, and whose life was in accord with his convictions and his religion.

Perhaps in no address did he so clearly and forcibly express his message to American Israel as in his lecture on "The Old Guard," which he delivered before the Young Men's Hebrew Association of New York in February, 1891. Recalling the chivalrous deeds of old-time princes in Israel, who formed the old guard that never surrendered, the roll of illustrious names from the Maccabees to Montefiore, teachers, philosophers, poets, preachers, men of affairs, he closed with these ringing words:

> By the memory of the Old Guard who never faltered in their duty to God and man, we appeal to the Jews to-day—be true, be noble, be loyal in devotion to principle.
>
> Duty is our watchword now as ever. No other race has understood or practiced it so unselfishly, so bravely, so devotedly. The motto of the French noble is our race's war-cry. Courtesy in externals is the modern manifestation of the soul's genuine greatness. It is not inconsistent with his faith for the Jew to be a loyal citizen. The Lord commands, "Seek ye the peace of the

land wherein ye dwell." It is not inconsistent with his religion to be a gentleman—the Law commands him to treat with tenderness the widow and the orphan, to respect the hoary head, to put no stumbling block before the blind, nor to curse the deaf, not to keep back the wages of the hired man for a single night, to be kind to the brute creation, to leave the corners of the field for the poor gleaners, not to vex the stranger. And the sum of all the philosophy of life is in its precept, "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

The Old Guard of the Hebrews were, then, true citizens, upright gentlemen. Their law, their race, obliged them to be examples of courtesy, kindness, justice, fair dealing, charity, loyalty, courage, devotion. Those true knights were ever ready to do battle for the right, to protect the poor and defenseless. They were incapable of dishonorable life—they could die for truth's sake. God bless the memory of our Old Guard!

In a lecture on "An Ancient Grudge" (1881), he discusses the story of persecution, and shows how persistent is the spirit of enmity, from whatever cause, which the Jew has had to endure, and from which he still suffers even in our present age of enlightenment. How shall the Jew act to-day in view of the survival of medievalism?

Those who advise a surrender of all that is distinctive in Judaism, may mean well, but they counsel treason. The Jews will act wisely in considering the condition under which people harmonize and coalesce in this age. They are not called upon to rebuild the synagogue so that it should be mistaken for a church. They have no right to substitute for the Law the temporary caprice of successful business men. They cannot gain public esteem by hypocrisy, and they should not delude themselves into the belief that the age of speculation will endure forever.

They should simply be Americans in America, Germans in Germany. This course is precisely in the direction taken by the Israelites of France and England. It has to do largely with externals, with manners, with modes of expression. And yet we

should not forget that the most patriotic and honored Americans in a distinctly American city, during the Revolution, were Quakers who maintained rigorously their quaint forms of worship and unique costume. Perhaps they would have been as cordially appreciated had they dressed like other men and women, but a dishonest Friend, a disloyal Friend, was unknown in the days of Rush and Franklin.

Conformity to American ways is not inconsistent with Judaism. Fidelity to Judaism is not in conflict with duty to the State.

In the world, as citizens, the foremost men of the Republic must be their models—Emerson, who glories in the vindication of merit rather than success—Webster, who says, "There is no evil one cannot face or fly from save the consciousness of duty undischarged"—Lincoln inspiring us "with malice towards none, with charity for all, doing the right as God gives us to see the right."

If the middle ages survive anywhere in spirit, the Jews may by their lives demonstrate how shameless, how absurd is the proscription. They must declare their ideal, by honoring their best men, not for mere success in ways of speculation, but for intelligent devotion to their calling, however humble, for honesty and purity in their walks, for patriotic ardor; success of which to be proud must imply character, capacity, merit.

With all our might, we must oppose the surrender of Judaism into the hands of the materialist. Judaism is still a power, unless we are recreants. Our creed is no longer a bar to existence as men—to the enjoyment of civil rights.

Let us remember that, as Lessing says, "God educated in the Jews the future teachers of mankind," and exclaim with Mendelssohn, "It is by virtue that I wish to shame the opprobrious opinion entertained of the Jew;" and as the brave and good Professor Lazarus of Berlin advises and inspires his fellow-believers to-day, "Be loyal to Judaism."

In a paper on "The People and the Synagogue," which he read before the New York Section of the Council of Jewish Women, in 1903, he admirably emphasized the duty of sacrifice in its relation to the Sabbath:

The question of Sabbath observance is one of will, of duty. The real difficulty is in the lack of principle—of moral education. True courage is manifested by doing one's duty, though the act involves sacrifices.

We have always been in a minority, men of principle are commonly in the minority. Shall we, therefore, yield and surrender to expediency? Shall we do wrong, because it is easier? Shall we violate the Law which God promulgated on Sinai because it is less of a sacrifice than to hear and to obey.

Yes, sacrifice for principle is unfashionable—abandon the practice. Yet half a million men and women exiled themselves from home and country rather than give up their religion—and this within the past twenty years and before our eyes.

Principle is to be abandoned because honesty seems to be unremunerative—the merchant who pays his debts and taxes cannot apparently compete with the bankrupt and the man who evades duties, and must he therefore discontinue the sacrifice?

Have the times changed so completely that the Sabbath cannot be observed? Men who break the Sabbath are not necessarily successful.

Observing the Sabbath may result in the temporary advancement of others to our apparent loss—but it is not a real loss. In the olden time, when the successful Jews in this city were conformists, we had a better standing in the community because of this fidelity to principle.

Sabbath observance is entirely practicable in this State. It is merely a question of obedience to law, whatever the sacrifice. The sacrifice may be minimized, if there is a particular department of manufacture or trade, of whom a majority are of the Jewish faith, and who would combine and close their places of business all day Saturday. But the sacrifice must be made. This is a difficult problem, but it is not impossible of solution.

The entire question narrows down to this—Do people appreciate a simple, quiet, modest life? Is the social jury which passes upon a man's right to respect on the part of his neighbors determined to weigh merits on the scales which some grocers use—quantity irrespective of quality or percentage of adulteration? If by common consent ostentation is condemned, then the citizen of upright life can retain his standing, although he does not indulge in extravagance, and can observe the Jewish Sabbath, though it seems to involve pecuniary sacrifice. If we strive all together to restore to Judaism the simplicity, firmness, and purity which Ezra and Nehemiah developed, we shall do our duty, and there is constant comfort and delight in the very contemplation of such faithfulness and resolution.

His ideal in reference to the Russian and Roumanian immigrant, with whom he was brought in close contact as president of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, was aptly expressed at the graduation exercises of the Hirsch Agricultural School, Woodbine, N. J., in March, 1902, when he alluded to the school as preparing its students to become farmers and giving them the opportunity and education to achieve success.

There is no intention and no obligation on the part of the Fund to support them or to dispense with faithful and constant labor on their part. Our duty toward them begins and ends with their preparation here. They are entitled to no more, nor does the Fund exact from them any return except fidelity to the lessons of industry and self-reliance taught here in harmony with the purely intellectual and technical course. . . . They have been cheered by the prospect of an honest and a permanent livelihood out of the soil. They have received adequate instruction, theoretical and practical. Their future is in their own hands.

At the reception tendered to M. Leroy-Beaulieu in New York, on May 15, 1904, a little more than a week before his death, he gave one of his most thoughtful addresses, wherein he showed how a certain antipathy to the Jews has arisen, but will disappear:

The barrier is social; it cannot disturb the civil rights, the political equality of all Americans. Starting with the children attending church and synagogue, the dislike is fostered by secret societies in institutions of learning, and is accentuated by the

rivalry of the newly-rich of American origin as against the newly-rich of foreign birth. But will not such barriers disappear before the sunshine of the bright day which discloses high ideals attained by some men and women of the Jewish race and admired by all men and women of the Jewish race? Will they not disappear, as it is made clear that material success alone is not the goal to which Jews aspire? They will disappear as Jews, thoughtful, patriotic, brilliant, brave, think with effect, write with power, discover and publish truths useful and grateful to mankind, proclaim far and wide the brotherhood of man. They disappear, as the world honors the benefactor of humanity, who declares that he holds his wealth in trust for those oppressed by fate. They disappear before the lofty resolution which inspired and impelled the Jews of the United States, who had in 1881 a position of respect and equality, socially as well as financially, commercially, and politically, to hazard all in their superiority to materialism, as they extended a helping hand to "kin beyond the sea," "exiles for conscience' sake."

Of his editorial contributions to *The Jewish Messenger,* which were marked throughout by a sagacity and idealism that lifted them out of the range of ordinary journalism and invested them with a character of their own, a paragraph from a leader on "The Opportunity of the Jew" may be cited here:

What a superb figure the Jew will be if, with his shrewdness and sagacity, he places principle above interest; the pure life, unwavering integrity, wisdom, truth, honor, and the spiritual life above material possessions. He is no mere dreamer, no speculative idealist; he knows the realities of life, and knowing them places the true estimate upon their respective values. Such an example, brilliantly displayed, would have an enormous influence for good. It would make the name of Jew synonymous with the noblest manhood and purest, fairest womanhood. It would save the Jew and none the less the nation. He is the best equipped for such a rôle. His religion, his heritage, his optimism, his destiny, all most forcibly invite to such a course. Not all can have the sturdiness, the self-reliance, and the initiative to enter upon this high engagement, but the bone and sinew of the Jewish people, the remnant untainted and uncorrupted, have still the energy that can make it possible. It is the Jew's great opportunity. Will he embrace it?

The life which closed suddenly on May 24, 1904, was essentially happy, because unselfish activity was its aim, and work for the highest its keynote. The general regret at his passing away and the warm tributes to his memory by those who knew him, and were more or less his associates in varied lines of municipal, educational, and charitable work,—this recognition of his worth as man and as Israelite showed his hold on the community, and its profound sense of indebtedness. For if love begets love, and words that come from the heart go to the heart, so is the world ready to reward with its benediction the ardent, unselfish worker, with life and creed in happy unison, whose devotion to his own was only intensified by his resolve to sweeten other lives and uplift the helpless for God and humanity.