

# Student Life at the Hebrew University.

By GEORGE M. HYMAN.

*Leading Jewish fraternities now maintain scholarships for students at the Hebrew University at Jerusalem. In the following article which deals with the cosmopolitan character of the student body on Mount Scopus, Mr. Georg M. Hyman, a member of Zeta Beta Tau, who lived for two years in Palestine and was assistant registrar of the University, tells of the building up of an academic tradition where none existed before.—Ed.*

Trudging up Mount Scopus at about seventy-three each morning, groups of students exchange greetings with a professor in corduroys as he cycles his way up the winding road. The clusters of stocky figures are varied in their costume—many wear black Russian blouses, some are in shorts, several of the girls have kerchiefs over their heads—all are bare-throated to the breezes that sweep down the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Below lies Jerusalem, the ancient city, painted as if on the backdrop of a stage setting, with the early sun coating sepulchre-white its cupolas and minarets, its age-old shrines and latter day temples of learning.

At the gates of the Hebrew University, these laboratory workers, library assistants, undergraduates and candidates for higher degrees are hailed by their fellow students, busy at their chores about the campus before the eight o'clock classes begin. A few huskies are manoeuvring wheel barrows laden with cement for the completion of the Einstein Institute of Physics. For the Hebrew University has literally been built, stone on stone, by the students themselves, preference in employment being given to students so that they may work their way through the course. A brilliant mathematician is hoeing the garden of sub-tropical plants, while the co-ed who has assisted in the editing of Hebrew translations of philosophical texts, is wringing out her mop—she has just completed the morning scrub down of the chemistry laboratories.

In a pioneer country like Palestine where sheer physical brawn is at a premium in the movement for the Jewish return to the soil, manual labour is invested with great dignity. Not all students are so fortunate as to get jobs on the University buildings. A few may obtain teaching positions in the city—they may chance on some American student who can afford to pay for coaching in Hebrew. Those holding teaching positions average about fifteen or twenty dollars a month, while a few who have full time positions earn somewhat more. The minimum monthly expenditure for a student in Jerusalem is about twenty-five dollars. As many cannot secure even this meagre income, they are able to exist only through the help of scholarships such as those established by American college fraternities and other groups in Jewish communities throughout the world.

The students in Jerusalem are using every possible means to help themselves. They have developed a co-operative lunchroom commons or *Mensa Academica*—as it is termed in the continental academic parlance favoured in Jerusalem. The Students' Organisation finances this undertaking which furnishes a nourishing meal at a cost of about fifteen cents. In addition, the Loan Fund of the Students' Organisation helps those in straightened circumstances and an

Employment Bureau seeks out available positions. A Dormitory or "Students' Hostel" is badly needed and would solve many vexing problems. This is a project that American students might well adopt as a significant gesture of brotherhood to their brethren overseas. Many a fraternity alumni group spends more on a single chapter house than would be required for a dormitory to meet the needs of the entire student body at the Hebrew University.

Students at the Hebrew University feel themselves responsible for the cultural development of the community at large, and their organisation each year arranges extension lectures for the general public in Jerusalem by members of the University staff. One cannot but be stirred by the appreciation and enthusiasm with which the extension course in music is received by the people of Jerusalem and the other Jewish settlements. These concert lectures draw such capacity audiences that the students literally hang from the walls. Where the curriculum does not yet offer instruction in modern languages, study groups have been organised in German, French and English—the latter usually led by one of the American students.

Festivities on the occasion of national holidays are sponsored by the Students' Organisation. A hike of several days' duration is arranged at Hanukkah time to the fortresses of the Maccabees. Those participating are advised to take along "blankets, food and a Bible"—an unailing source book and sign-manual in an ancient land where the history of our people's past is being translated into present day realities. There are few campus ceremonies more stirring than that of the tree planting on the summit of Mount Scopus. The singing column, four abreast, marches up the mountain road to celebrate the coming of spring by the planting of saplings in the Warburg Wood. The dancing of the "hora" in the amphitheatre, with the full moon coming up over the Mountains of Moab, some thirty miles across the Jordan Valley, is a spectacle to be equalled on few campuses.

While on the average more serious-minded than American undergraduates, students of the Hebrew University are hardened into men by the rugged requirements of their environment and need no artificial "preparation" for life. They share in the high adventure of living in the Holy Land where many extremes have to be brought into harmony with each other; they have a part in the struggle with the primitive; theirs is the joy and the jeopardy of creation in a new-old land.

A student of anthropology may have his data at his doorstep in the still unfathomed East but to obtain adequate material he must seek it out among the semi-civilised natives. To this end he might find it necessary actually to live among the Bedouin as did a member of the School of Oriental Studies at the Hebrew University, a fluent Arabist, who hired out as a shepherd among the tribesmen of Trans-Jordan. Like Colonel Lawrence he donned native garb, raised a beard, and followed the ways of the nomad, in order to gain the complete confidence of these sons of Shem in his mission of peace and science. As a result he succeeded

in unearthing exhaustive data dealing with folklore of the locality. A class in ancient history, archaeology, zoology, or botany has merely to extend its field work to the hills beyond Mount Scopus to explore a region rich in source material. But the professor who ventures forth at the head of such a group must be well equipped to cope with the dangers as well as the secrets of the desert.

The Hebrew University is a true University in the sense implied by Cardinal Newman as "the assemblage of strangers from all parts in one spot." While about half of the student body consists of Palestinians, the rest have pilgrimed their way from ten different countries—the United States usually ranking fourth or fifth among the lands represented. These are spread over as wide a geographic distribution as England, Egypt and Roumania. Some have been denied a higher education in European countries because of *numerus clausus* restrictions against Jewish students. The age level is higher than at American universities and most of the students would be considered of graduate rank, many already having their bachelor's degree.

This "gathering of the exiles" makes for an interchange of ideas and customs that is unusually stimulating and should prove significant and fruitful, although at times it makes for somewhat amusing manifestations. The American B.A. comes with his notions as to student activities, but finds that one cannot superimpose the *mores* of a fresh water college on a group of students with a different background. Many of these have been reared in a European environment which they carry with them over into an Oriental country where a university never before existed. For example, there is a sort of fraternity modelled along the lines of a German student "corporation" with all the accoutrements of "Student Prince" fame—elaborate insignia, vari-coloured ribands and the rest of the Teutonic fraternity paraphernalia transplanted bodily at second hand to the Holy Land.

Student groups find their lines of cleavage not around social groupings but have their focus in political and other ideals. The very names of the student societies give an indication of this intense interest in the development of the Palestinian body politic. The Labour group is one of the strongest and may be said to uphold the cause of liberalism on the campus as represented in the Labour movement. The "Yavneh" Society encourages the religious interests of the students especially fostering an acquaintance with religious literature. There is the "Huldah" nationalist group and the academic section of the Revisionist Party.

Yet those varying tendencies are beginning to blend and a new, indigenous academic tradition is emerging in Zion. So, too, we find here a new type of Jewish student steeped in Jewish lore, bringing with him the fullness of his heritage of intellect and intelligence, self-reliant, fearless in the face of primitive forces, a product to which the whole world may point with pride and say—here, at last, is the true Jew—the Jewish students of the future.

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