

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

SAMUEL HILLEL ISAACS was born in the small town of Ratzk, Russian Poland, in June 1825. As a child he was very ambitious to acquire knowledge and his parents made many sacrifices for their son's education. When the boy grew to manhood, he studied under such renowned teachers as Judah Bachrach, Moses Leib of Kutna and others of prominence. At the age of twenty-two he emigrated to America, then considered the "golden land of opportunity," arriving in New York City, June 30, 1847.

The path of the young student was strewn with many difficulties. While he thirsted for knowledge, he was dependent on his own efforts for a livelihood. Without means and without friends he soon realized that he must learn a trade in order to maintain himself and become master of at least part of his time for religious observance and study. There were no night schools in those days for Jewish immigrants, nor any of the numerous educational facilities of later years and the young man at once set himself to the task of learning the English language by his own efforts, literally "burning the midnight oil" and often for economy using wrapping paper for writing exercises.

In those early days the Jewish population of New York City was limited. Accordingly Jewish hospitality to the stranger was a feature of every day life. Close friendships were formed, which endured to the end. Mr. Isaacs' perseverance and indomitable will soon brought results. At the end of two years, in 1849, he had met and won the beautiful Miriam Hadassah, daughter of Ezekiel and Cherna Filipowski who, with their family, were among the earliest arrivals from Russian Poland in America.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

Mr. Isaacs had learned the cigar trade. A few years later he became the proprietor of a small cigar factory and was his own salesman. Step by step his industry and thrift carried him onward until he established himself as a wholesale leaf tobacco merchant, often traveling to the tobacco fields of Virginia and Connecticut to purchase his stock.

Samuel Hillel Isaacs soon became the center of a group of learned men whose greatest pleasure was to gather together for religious, scientific and philosophical discussion and he was often called upon to participate in public ceremonies of a religious nature. His venturesome disposition showed itself by a trip to the gold fields of California in 1850, from which he returned sadly disappointed. His deep religious fervor was manifested by his intense desire to journey to Jerusalem with his family to live there. For this purpose, Mr. Isaacs, accompanied by his wife and four children, sailed for London, England, in 1860. Encountering unexpected financial difficulties which prevented him from continuing his journey, they were compelled to return to New York City.

During all his vicissitudes, he was a scrupulous observer of his religion in and out of his home. He never abandoned his studies and often contributed to Jewish periodicals in Hebrew, Yiddish and English. Strong articles appeared from his pen on the vital questions of the day such as "Shechita" (the Jewish mode of slaughtering animals) and "Milath Gerim" (circumcision of converts). He took an active part in Hebrew and Jewish educational problems and was fearless and outspoken for the truth. Although of a naturally retiring and courteous disposition he did not hesitate to criticize faulty statements even if emanating from those high in authority.

In 1890, at the age of 65, Mr. Isaacs retired from active business life to a home in Bath Beach, L. I., accompanied

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

by his ever faithful wife. A family of ten children had blessed their union, four of whom died in childhood. Their remaining four sons and two daughters were married and in homes of their own. Thenceforth, Mr. Isaacs devoted himself to study and original research.

His mathematical and astronomical studies led him to specialize on the Hebrew and secular calendars. In 1891 he secured the copyright for an ingenious scientific arrangement of "A Calendar for a Hundred Years" and "An Artificial and Perpetual Calendar, Old and New Styles with the Dominical letters for each year." These received high praise from the *Scientific American*, the U. S. Government Bureau and other noted authorities.

A later production which has not been printed is "A Civil and Ecclesiastical Perpetual Calendar" including a special "Table for Easter and the Movable Festivals." To this was added a *Perpetual Hebrew Calendar* which is so constructed as to answer all calendar purposes and is probably the only one of its kind extant. When the correctness of the Hebrew Calendar for futurity was called into question by a noted authority in a public lecture delivered in Philadelphia, Mr. Isaacs immediately contributed a trenchant and valuable criticism in its defense which was published in the *Jewish Messenger* of New York City.<sup>1</sup>

He was also a valued contributor to *Torah M'Zion*, a Hebrew monthly published in Jerusalem which reprinted in pamphlet form (1901-08) his monographs on "Maamar Hodshe ha-Shanah" (Essay on the Hebrew Calendar), "Maamar Petach Enayyim" (An Explanation of some Halachic Passages in the Talmud), "Teome Zwiya" (The Twin Fawns; Essay on Palestinian Geography).

It was after the first Hague Peace Convention that he was persuaded by friends to prepare for English Biblical

<sup>1</sup>September, 1896.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

scholars his discoveries concerning the true boundaries of the Holy Land. With almost the vision of a prophet he outlined in his "Preface" such events as he foresaw would occur in the world's history. For years he laboriously gathered and prepared his material, his failing health making it ever more difficult. The loss of his beloved daughter, Hannah Rachel Phillips of Chicago in April 1899, and again the death of his devoted son, Prof. Archibald E. Isaacs, who was a noted surgeon of New York City, in March 1913, were afflictions from which he never recovered.

Feeling keenly the loss of his devoted wife, who passed away in November, 1913, Mr. Isaacs, then 89 years of age, was brought to his daughter's home in Chicago. Physically feeble, but with mental faculties unimpaired, he endeavored to forget his grief by continued study. He finished the revision of his manuscript on the "True Boundaries of the Holy Land" and began Part II of his "Teome Zwiya" with Maps (in Hebrew), which remained unfinished. At the ripe age of 92, after an illness of five months, he was called to his eternal home, January 10, 1917, and was laid to rest in the family plot in Mount Carmel Cemetery, L. I., (Kehillath Jeshuran, N. Y.). Surviving him are two sons, one daughter and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

With him life and religion were intertwined and could not be separated. Undaunted by surrounding conditions he lived in a world all his own into which he introduced at times companions of other cultures. His character may well be expressed in a quotation from the Midrash found on the title page of his scrap book of 1879:

"Hast thou sense,  
What lackest thou?  
Lackest thou sense,  
What hast thou?"

*Chicago, September, 1917—5678.*