From the J-Vault: "in his own language"

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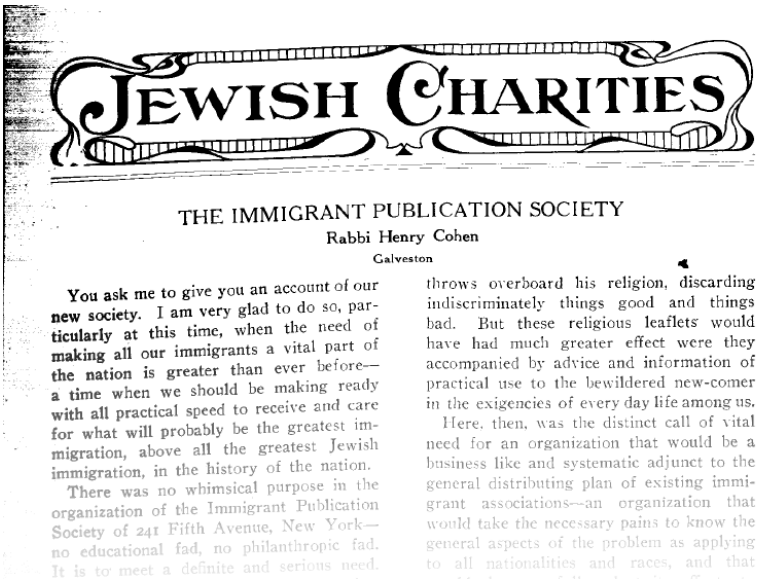
J•VAULT
The Berman Jewish Policy Archive (BJPA)

"For the success of this work of Americanizing and educating the immigrant," writes Rabbi Henry Cohen, "one thing is essential. You must go to him first in a friendly and democratic way in his own language."

As you may have seen, our **March newsletter** featured a **Reader's Guide to Jewish Languages**, in connection with an **upcoming event on Dual Language Public Schools**. (March 26th, from 3 to 5. **Click here** to RSVP.) At the event, educators and scholars will discuss issues of language and education, especially as they relate to issues of culture and identity in the United States. This installment of the J-Vault explores related concepts.

This week, from the J-Vault: *The Immigrant Publication Society* (1915)



JEWISH CHARITIES

THE IMMIGRANT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Rabbi Henry Cohen

Galveston

You ask me to give you an account of our new society. I am very glad to do so, particularly at this time, when the need of making all our immigrants a vital part of the nation is greater than ever before—a time when we should be making ready with all practical speed to receive and care for what will probably be the greatest immigration, above all the greatest Jewish immigration, in the history of the nation.

There was no whimsical purpose in the organization of the Immigrant Publication Society of 241 Fifth Avenue, New York—no educational fad, no philanthropic fad. It is to meet a definite and serious need.

throws overboard his religion, discarding indiscriminately things good and things bad. But these religious leaflets would have had much greater effect were they accompanied by advice and information of practical use to the bewildered new-comer in the exigencies of every day life among us.

Here, then, was the distinct call of vital need for an organization that would be a business like and systematic adjunct to the general distributing plan of existing immigrant associations—an organization that would take the necessary pains to know the general aspects of the problem as applying to all nationalities and races, and that

> *You ask me to give you an account of our new society. I am very glad to do so, particularly at this time, when the need of making all our immigrants a vital part of the nation is greater than ever before...*
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> *For the success of this work of Americanizing and educating the immigrant, one thing is essential. You must go to him first in a friendly and democratic way in his own language. This is the only way to reach him. Every stress must of course be laid upon the necessity of his learning English, and simple and practical books on learning it must be promptly offered him. But to the cleverest, the simplest English book is at first impossible. Not everyone has the gift of languages. Some few never learn any English at all, but, fortunately, experience gives abundant proof that the immigrant can absorb the spirit of the new country through his own language...*
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> *The first step in so essentially a patriotic American work was the preparation, curiously enough at the suggestion of the Royal Italian Immigration Commission, of an Immigrant's Guide, telling the newcomer*

> *the things which he needs to know, and which he knows he needs... The success of this "Little Green Book," as it was at once called, was immediate. With the cordial help of many interested Jewish societies, it was soon carefully adapted in every detail for the use of the English - speaking immigrants.*

Describing the success of the book, and bolstering his case for the need of a new organization dedicated to publishing non-English books, Rabbi Cohen noted that the **New York Public Library** was in the midst of a sharp rise in demand for Yiddish books.

> *But ordinarily the librarian in opening a department in a foreign language is forced to depend upon a chance adviser, with consequences that are sometimes amusing, sometimes really disastrous. The problem presents serious difficulties. How can the librarian be sure of giving the immigrant the best books and papers in his own language, not only for his pleasure, but very practically to help him, explaining America and its opportunities, putting before him the means of learning English, of becoming an American citizen, and of satisfying many of the most important necessities of his new life? How can the librarian be sure that she is not innocently placing on the shelves books that are atheistic, anarchistic, propagandizing, indecent or simply "trash?" What hooks should she buy first? What size are they? What do they cost? How shall the foreigner be taught the privileges and rules of the library?...*
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> *How remarkable a thing it is that the first popular Yiddish bibliography published in America should be printed at the insistence of American librarians—one of a series that Mr. Anderson, with the practical experience of New York, says, are: "Exactly what we need to help us make the immigrant understand America and its institutions."*

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