

Yiddish documents and an indispensable tool for all future researchers into Jewish life and culture. It is also useful in understanding the contributions to the Hebrew language and literature of recent centuries, because the mother-tongue of most Hebrew writers of this period was Yiddish, "and the written word of modern Hebrew . . . was blended with the unwritten and the unexpressed image in Yiddish" (S. Rawidowicz).

Through the efforts of collectors we have saved from oblivion thousands of words which are not included in literary Yiddish but were acceptable in the spoken language. It was important that this be done now, lest they be relegated to oblivion. We have always had in mind that of the six million victims of the Nazi holocaust, at least five million were Yiddish-speaking and that Jewish cultural life is vanishing in Eastern Europe, the area where Yiddish reached the highest levels of creativity. We are also aware that Yiddish is increasingly affected by lingual assimilation to other languages. In view of this we could not postpone the work on the dictionary. "For the semantic and stylistic interpretation of Yiddish vocables, it is particularly favorable that for the preparation of the dictionary there are still scholars for whom Yiddish is a mother-tongue and who reached adulthood before the language suffered so terribly from the annihilation of Eastern European Jewry" (Roman Jakobson).

Individuals and organizations who formerly made attempts in Europe and in this country to work on a comprehensive Yiddish-Yiddish dictionary were unable to carry their work to a successful conclusion. Valuable collections of material were lost in Vilno and in Minsk during World War II. A new start had to be made. It is almost a decade since the Yiddish Dictionary Committee was organized and the editorial board appointed. The Yivo Institute for Jewish Research assisted in the organization, provided office space, and put its great library and archives at the disposal of the Dictionary Committee. A group of linguists was attracted to the project and an appeal in the Jewish world press brought a heartening response. From all corners of the world collectors of words and expressions sent in their valuable collections. The editors recruited correspondents and collaborators. Altogether, about three hundred persons were involved in the work. The editors, all the collectors, and almost all the collaborators volunteered their services. A small staff of employees did the technical work.

Materials were received from all continents, but the project is primarily an adventure of American Jewry and the results are an important cultural contribution on the part of the Jewish communities of the United States.

The present card index already contains about 180,000 words, tens of thousands of quotations for future volumes, and definitions of thousands of words. The present volume is the first; there are nine volumes to follow. The tempo of the work and the time of the publication of the other volumes depend on the funds that will be made available. The Yiddish Dictionary Committee thanks all who have helped until now (the names of the larger contributors are listed in the Yiddish preface) and hopes that organizations, foundations, and individuals will provide sufficient support to make it possible for the additional volumes to be published without undue delay.

*THE PUBLISHERS*