

**EZRA STILES AND THE JEWS:  
SELECTED PASSAGES FROM HIS  
LITERARY DIARY CONCERNING  
JEWS AND JUDAISM**

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Ezra Stiles and the Jews: Selected Passages from His Literary Diary Concerning Jews and Judaism by George Alexander Kohut

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**GEORGE ALEXANDER KOHUT**

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# Ezra Stiles and the Jews

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM HIS

## Literary Diary

CONCERNING JEWS AND JUDAISM

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY

GEORGE ALEXANDER KOHUT

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To  
Newman Cowen, Esq.,  
these pages are reverently inscribed.

## CONTENTS

|   | PAGE      |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction .....  | 5-13      |
| His Semitic Scholarship and his Jewish Friends.....                     | 14-28     |
| Jews charged with Toryism.....  | 28-37     |
| Conversions of Jews in New England and elsewhere ...                    | 37-49     |
| His Progress in Semitics and some Notes on the New-<br>port Jews.....   | 49-64     |
| A Letter from the Holy Land .....                                       | 64-66     |
| Two Newport Jews.....   | 66-67     |
| Some Female Hebraists.....  | 67-72     |
| A Word on Jewish Ceremonials and Proselytes.....                        | 72-77     |
| Bibliographical.....  | 77-78     |
| The Rabbis whom Dr. Stiles Knew .....                                   | 78-98     |
| Further Progress in Semitics and the Study of Hebrew<br>at Yale.....    | 99-107    |
| <br><i>Appendix I.—Statistical Notes :</i>                              |           |
| 1. The Jews in Newport  | } 108-113 |
| 2. Jews in New Haven and elsewhere in Connecticut                       |           |
| 3. Jews in Philadelphia   |           |
| 4. Jews in Georgia  |           |
| <i>Appendix II.—Rabbi Haijm Isaac Carigal and Ezra<br/>Stiles .....</i> | 114-133   |
| <br><i>Appendix III.—Miscellaneous Notes :</i>                          |           |
| 1. Jews in Charleston, S. C.  | } 134-143 |
| 2. A Newport Jew, a Portrait, and an Epi-<br>taph                       |           |
| 3. Obituary Notices of the Lopez Family                                 |           |
| <i>Index.....</i>   | 145-152   |
| <i>Additions and Corrections .....</i>                                  | 153-155   |
| <br><i>List of Illustrations :</i>                                      |           |
| 1. Facsimile of the title-page of a <i>Discourse</i> , 1722...          | 39        |
| 2. Facsimile of the title-page of an <i>Essay</i> , 1722.....           | 41        |
| 3. The Synagogue at Newport .....                                       | 60        |
| 4. Portrait of Rabbi Haijm Isaac Carigal.....                           | 90        |





## EZRA STILES AND THE JEWS.\*

### INTRODUCTION.

The fact that Yale College, which celebrated its bicentennial at New Haven last week (Oct 1901) with so much eclat, has on its corporate seal, in addition to a Latin inscription, one in Hebrew, is a significant as well as a curious circumstance. It represents an open book, upon which are inscribed the symbolic words, אורים וּתְמִימִים (*Urim v' Tummim*). It illustrates the influence of the Old Testament upon the thought and policy of New England—an influence more paramount in the colony of New Haven than possibly anywhere else, if we may judge from the following passage of an enactment, bearing the date 1644, which proclaims that

"In the beginning of the foundation of this plantation and jurisdiction, upon a free debate with due and serious consideration, it was agreed, concluded and settled as a fundamental law, not to be disputed or questioned hereafter, that the judicial laws of God, as they were delivered by Moses and expounded in other parts of Scripture, so far as they are a fence to the moral law, being neither typical nor ceremonial, nor having a reference to Canaan, shall be accepted as of moral equity, and as God shall help, shall be a constant direction for all proceedings here and a general rule for all courts in this jurisdiction, how to judge between party and party and how to punish offenders, till the same be branched out into particulars hereafter."

This vigorous avowal of the binding force of Old Testament doctrine had much to do in shaping the destinies of the colony and university. The study of Hebrew was not only encouraged, but,

\* The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles. Edited with notes by F. B. Dexter, three volumes, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901.

under President Stiles' incumbency, made compulsory for a time, no doubt the deeper to impress the students with a sense of the importance and sublimity of Holy Writ, and to induce a profounder view of the spiritual. Dr. Stiles was too sturdy a churchman to suffer himself to abate in his zeal, either in biblical study or in the instruction of Hebrew, which he considered a vehicle of salvation, or, as Cotton Mather so eloquently said, "the fiery chariot to carry one heavenwards." From the Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, just published with valuable notes by Professor F. B. Dexter, of Yale University, we learn that no man's education was considered quite complete without an adequate knowledge of the sacred tongue and, whoever pretended to scholarship at all, was constrained, whether he willed it or not, to be "a good Hebrician," as Ezra Stiles terms it. He has preserved for us the names of such of his learned contemporaries who have attained proficiency in the study of Hebrew, and on one or two epitaphs, probably composed by Dr. Stiles, the necrologic formula of the Old Testament, usually inscribed on Jewish tombs, *Zeher Tsaddik Livracha*, is added in Hebrew characters. There were even women Hebraists in his day whose accomplishments are commemorated in his Diary. Not only his sons, but his second wife and daughter as well, studied Hebrew. A knowledge of the Bible was the *sine qua non* of all culture, and we need not be surprised to find his wife attending one of his classes (cf. Vol. III., p. 526). The following entry under date of July 21st, 1793 (cf. Vol. III., p. 499) is significant:

"My wife died 1775 She read thro' the Bible, five times the last four years of her life, once in about 9 or 10 months. Kezia [his daughter, born September, 1760,] died 1785, she read it thro' five times the last five years of her life.