

Religious Education--Israel's Best Hope

An Interview With Sol Rosenbloom, of Pittsburgh

By H. Norman Shoop

Not in the accumulation of wealth, the fulfillment of political or social ambitions, the growth of numbers, the achievement of power, influence and world-wide glory and fame, the attainment of first honors in the field of science and arts, prominence in humanitarian and philanthropic endeavors, not in peace nor in war;—not in any of these things rests primarily the security of the futurity of Israel and Israel's people.

Israel's future life will be safeguarded only through the study and knowledge of its precious literature, its language and its history, and the observance and respect of its priceless, centuries-old traditions, laws and commandments.

Jewish education is the master key that will everlastingly lock and seal the door to prejudice, animosity and religious hatred; the same key will open wide the door that leads the way to immortal life, peace and contentment.

Israel's manifold, age-old problems and perplexities will vanish in the religious and educational enlightenment of Israel's own.

When Jews fully acknowledge and accept their heritage; when they learn to know the soundness and truth of the holy, divinely-conceived utterances of their prophetic sainted forefathers, when they have irrevocably concluded and agreed among themselves that this faith must be constituted as a living, vital, supreme force and factor in the affairs of men over the entire civilized world, and that the solution of the problem of Jewish education is the greatest, most difficult and most urgent task before world Jewry today, then, and only then, can we safely and proudly exclaim: "Judaism and Jewry have been made safe for all time."

For fully two hours the writer listened to these wise and logical utterances in an interview with Sol Rosenbloom of Pittsburgh—the same Sol Rosenbloom whose magnanimity and liberal contributions and sacrifices, both in money and personal service, to the national homeland, Jewish education, charities and other similar good causes, has elicited the plaudits and praise of American Jewry and many thousands more throughout the world.

The above statements in full were the salient points in his remarks which constitute the first in a series of interviews, on the general subject "Jewish Education." He was asked to give the initial interview because in the capacity of president of the Hebrew Institute of Pittsburgh, he stands at the helm of one of the leading, outstanding educational institutions of its nature in America.

And there are a number of other reasons why Mr. Rosenbloom was requested to submit to questioning on this particular subject. Before coming to America, he studied as a youth in the Yeshiva in Slonim and Zaludok in Russian Poland, where he was prepared for the rabbinate. Both of his great-grandfathers were famous Russian rabbis, one in Suchowolia, and the other in Ticktin. As a student of the Talmud and of Jewish philosophy he distinguished himself, and in the Yeshiva he was considered a Chariff and an Illu.

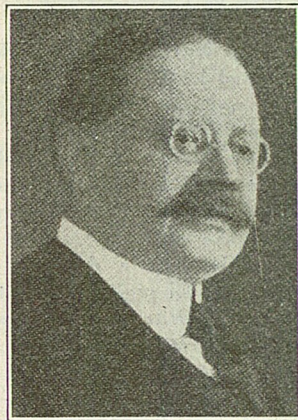
After coming to the United States he continued his Talmudic and philosophic studies. Notwithstanding the economic struggle of his earlier years and despite the wonderful commercial success of his later years, he nevertheless always found time to keep fresh and deepen his love for his studies and his devotion to Hebrew cul-

ture. Today he is considered an authority on the writings and philosophies of Jehudah Halevy, Maimonides, Iben Ezra and others of that great School.

He has written for the Menorah Journal and is the author of a number of brochures and letters on Jewish theology, literature and philosophy, in all of which he has shown a striking and original independence of thought.

Newspapermen who have interviewed him before have told of his quaint, warm simplicity; his unobtrusive, modest speech; his profound conception of the subject and his keen, broad, concise conclusions.

His utterances are genuine; utterances that bespeak fullest comprehen-



Sol. Ros nbloom

sion, a thorough, wide-awake understanding and knowledge of the subject. Above all originality characterizes his thoughts so convincingly expressed. Behind a calm, cool and reserved countenance and demeanor there is a deadly earnestness and intensity, proving beyond the slightest possibility of contradiction the fact of the presence of a burning, glowing whole-hearted, all-consuming love and pride in his faith and unstinted devotion to his people.

"To my mind," he declared, "the existence of the Jews as a people can find no other justification except as they continue to exemplify by their lives and deeds those high spiritual and moral values which they have revealed to the world and which has been their mission to propagate among the nations of the earth. However great may be the achievement of the Jew in the field of art, science and material accomplishment, his peculiar field of endeavor lies in his ordained and chosen capacity—in the spiritual improvement of himself, and in serving as a living, ennobling symbol to the world at large. Failing in this respect, the Jew has failed in all others."

"Hasn't the Jew grown spiritually in the last century?"

"For this last century, roughly speaking, the Jewish spirit has been submerged, as it were, by a great many adverse influences over some of which we had no control, especially by the materialistic tendencies so characteristic of our present age. As a result, Jewry stands indicted before the bar of the world's judgment as guilty of failure to vitalize the highest ideals of their religion and culture and to embody them in everyday life.

"This indictment is especially severe against us Jews of America. In this blessed country, we have always enjoyed a better opportunity to maintain and develop the essentials of Judaism than has been the good fortune of our brethren elsewhere."

Here are a few more of his gems of thought:

Jews of America can best repay their debt of gratitude to these United States of America by developing their ideal!

The best citizen is the Jew with the best Jewish education and most religion!

The ideal of the American people is the same as the ideal of Judaism. The Golden Rule advocating fair and square play was advocated and propounded and practiced by Jews thousands of years ago!

Asserting that the ravages of war in Europe have made it impossible for the remnants of Jews there to keep the light of Judaism burning, Mr. Rosenbloom called upon Jews of America to become in effect, the guardians of "that wonderful fountainhead of Jewish learning and Jewish culture, which in their final analyses, furnish a loftier understanding and practice of righteousness, justice and peace."

"It is said to be contemplated that in our own time, the most critical period in the history of mankind, Jewry has been unable to exert a moral influence sufficiently strong to soften the unbridled passions of contemporary civilization, and thus demonstrate the vitality of Judaism and its ideals."

"What of a re-awakening of interest in Jewish education in this country?"

"That is our only consolation. We appear to have finally awakened to the full significance of the immense obligation which we Jews in America owe to God; to our country; to our ancestors; to ourselves and to the generations which are to follow us. The establishment of the Hebrew Institute in Pittsburgh and its rapid growth and extension in all departments, the nation-wide praise of its work, attests to this fact."

"Let us hope and feel that this Hebrew Institute and others throughout the country merely marks the first milestone in our long neglected task. Let us determine to make Judaism safe for Jews and to instill in our children full appreciation of the heritage that is theirs. Let us resolve to clear them of the stigma that, belonging to a people foremost in the history of civilization, we have been deteriorating, and have, according to our enemies, reached a cultural and spiritual level, inferior to that of other civilized peoples."

"Jewish education," he asserted, "is an undertaking worthy of our greatest aspirations, demanding our supreme efforts of co-operation and deserving our utmost moral and financial assistance."

"Let us therefore, sound to our brethren the clarion call of duty, and I feel sure that they will fully respond. However, let us not stop at the Hebrew Institute. Let us proceed to formulate ways and adopt means whereby Judaism is to become a throbbing and ennobling force in our lives; a force as radiant and powerful that it will luster to the name Jew; a force that will counteract the temporary suspension of the heretofore vital Jewish influence that our brethren in Europe have nourished; a force that will write a glorious page in the history of American Jewry."

"Does the Jewish school compete, conflict or interfere in any manner with the public schools?"

"Certainly not! The hours of study are so arranged in most Hebrew schools throughout the country as to permit the child sufficient time between dismissal from the public school under the gong, summoning children to their classes.

"I predict that the time will come when universities and colleges will consider the knowledge of Hebrew, Jewish history and Jewish literature equivalent to the knowledge of Ger-

man, Latin, French or any other language; that the knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish history and literature, as taught at the Hebrew Institute, will entitle students seeking admission to colleges or universities the same credit or credits that the knowledge of German, French, Latin, or any other language would entitle him."

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