

EDITORIAL

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CHANUKAH

THE PHASE of the Maccabean victory that impresses us most is that the Jews fought for their religion. It seems that only when that which they held sacred was in danger of being destroyed they developed the courage to fight against overwhelming odds and defeat them. The Syrians were bad psychologists. They should have known that that which brings most people's fighting blood to the surface is religion. These days we wonder how many Jews would summon such courage to fight an invading host which threatened their religion. Interwoven with the celebration of most religious festivals there is always something that is sentimental rather than factual. We must allow for the lapse of time which probably obliterated some of the details which have been filled in by more imaginative minds. But the fact remains that a group of Jews, under the leadership of a man of super-human courage, tried to the limit of endurance by a larger force of Syrians who harrassed them until life became unbearable, did under provocation of the defilement of their holy things rise to a pitch of amazing power, and routed the enemy. In that story the Jew finds today, as always, reason for gratitude. But it is interesting to note that the Jew always finds in every historical event reason for renewed hope in God's goodness and mercy. It is truly remarkable how the Jews can maintain their morale through the most trying situations, at times when their very extinction is threatened by their boundless faith in God. The festival of Chanukah arouses in the Jew an admiration for the Maccabees who were such good fighters. The physical heroes are usually more dramatic than the mental heroes; they appeal more to the imagination. So the Jew today who has any feeling for tradition takes pride in the thought that while at times down through the ages his people may have been physically handicapped through enforced confinement in the Ghettoes, yet there was a day and an age in the history of Israel when there were great fighters, strong leaders and the greatest of them all was Judas Maccabee. The same Jew will take pride in the fact that monotheism was preserved to the world through the conquest by these men. Thus, all through the winter nights flicker the Chanukah candles, and the children recite the story of the brave Maccabees. It is cast in a heroic mold and appeals to the child. But even more important, it offers the opportunity to give to the Jewish child a present at just about the same period when his Christian playmate or acquaintance is planning for his Christmas gift. We have contended that somehow the Jews have never been able, at least in these recent days, to dramatize the festival of lights so that it can in some manner overcome the influence and the impression of the Christmas festival. We admire

the courage and the convictions of Jews who make a brave struggle against odds, and who swim against the tide, but sometimes we become impatient with the futility of their efforts. If the Central Conference of American Rabbis and other rabbinical groups want to do something that will arouse a keener interest in the child-mind in the festival of Chanukah, they should set their minds to the task of dramatizing it to a greater degree than at present. We recall that the late J. Leonard Levy once had the same thought in mind. He felt that the Christmas celebration and the influence of the season completely submerged the Chanukah celebration in the mind of the Jewish youngster. Perhaps our Rabbis, viewing the situation from a practical standpoint, may be able if they turn their minds to the problem to find some way of meeting the handicap.

CORNERSTONE LAYING

THE ORTHODOX community has expressed itself in a very progressive way through the medium of the Beth Shalom Congregation in Squirrel Hill. When we say that we do not mean that the congregation has in the slightest degree compromised its orthodoxy but that there is present in that group a progressive spirit which has made possible the attainment of an outstanding position. It is to our mind one of the most representative orthodox congregations in the country. It has become increasingly evident that the original modest-sized structure for a long time has been unable to meet the needs of a constantly increasing membership, so a year ago, we think it was just a year ago this week, ground was broken for a new and larger edifice. As with every other forward movement some said this and some said that and some said the other thing. Was it a good thing at this time to go into a larger building operation and so on and so forth. But the optimists won. So with enthusiasm and energy and under the dynamic leadership of its President, M. L. Avner, and its earnest Rabbi, Goodman Rose, as well as other inspirational associates, the job was undertaken. And now next Sunday afternoon, December 21st, as the climax of a joyous festival, Beth Shalom Congregation will lay the cornerstone of its new edifice. The present building will be used, when the new structure is completed, for school purposes, where Hebrew and the study of the Bible will form the principal courses. The officers and the members of the congregation are

to be congratulated upon arriving within sight of the promised land of their ambitions. And all elements in local Jewry who are interested in the development of the spiritual and cultural life of the Jewish people are invited to be present on this occasion next Sunday. To reach even this stage in its work has required sacrifices of time, money and effort, but we feel sure that everyone who is at all familiar with communal problems will agree that the constant growth of the Jewish population in the Squirrel Hill district makes it essential that an adequate synagogue should be created to care for the religious needs of that population. We have said before and we say again that we are in a state of constant surprise at the continued strength and growth of Orthodox worship in this country. But we say in all sincerity that the orthodox synagogues of the type of Beth Shalom will do far more to keep alive the spirit of orthodoxy than the old synagogues that were uninviting, especially to the younger element. One need only visit Beth Shalom to realize to what extent the younger generation has vitalized the congregation, and we have reason to believe that the modern spirit of those in control has had much to do with attracting and holding the interest of the young men and young women who, after all, must be the ones to carry on after their elders have passed on. There is undoubtedly a swing back from extreme Reform, and as time goes on there will be an introduction of more ceremonialism in the Reform services. This would happen today if it depended upon the personal inclinations of a majority of the memberships in the Reform congregations, but they yield to the policy of the leaders. The time, however, is coming when a Reform congregation will resemble the present so-called conservative congregation, and in the meantime we extend our good wishes to our friends of Beth Shalom in the realization of their hopes and ambitions. We know that when the building is completed it will be a credit to the congregation and a greater spiritual force in the life of our community.

SHOULD HE HAVE ANSWERED?

WE HAVE been asked the question, "Should Judge Lindsey have answered Bishop Manning publicly, or do you believe that it is proper under any circumstance to interrupt the speaker in the pulpit?" We answer unqualifiedly, "No!" We have been present at religious services where a rabbi has been interrupted from the pew in the course of his sermon. It caused confusion and disorder. When the minister or rabbi is in the pulpit, that is his hour. He is there to deliver his message to his congregation. If we wish an open forum then we have something else again. But one can easily appreciate how impossible it would be to have the members of the congregation trying to discuss and debate with the minister during the service. There is a place and time for everything, and Judge Lindsey should have answered Bishop Manning through the press or through a speech elsewhere.

NOTICE!

TO INSURE PUBLICATION, ALL NEWS MATERIAL FOR NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE, DECEMBER 26, MUST BE IN OUR OFFICE NOT LATER THAN TUESDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 23.