

The Jewish Mark Twain.

INTERVIEW FOR JEWISH CHRONICLE WITH
"SHALOM ALEICHEM."

AT the last Zionist Congress, one event aroused widespread interest and attention. This was the Hebrew session which showed what great progress the Hebrew language has made during recent years, and what excellent prospects it has of becoming once more the national tongue of the people of Israel. Its claims in this respect are not altogether unchallenged, and notably the representatives of the Poalei Zion urged at the Congress, that as a fact, Yiddish was far more the national language of the Jews to-day. This view derives strength from the fact—recently referred to by Heinrich Loewe in his work on "Die Sprachen der Juden"—that nearly four-fifths of the Jewish population of the world use Yiddish as their vernacular. In reference to this question, it will be of interest to hear the views of the most popular of modern Jewish writers, Shalom Rabinowitz, better known under the pseudonym of "Shalom Aleichem," who has been good enough to grant an interview to a representative of the JEWISH CHRONICLE.

It is hardly necessary to say who Shalom Aleichem is. His fame is perhaps best characterised by the following anecdote. Mark Twain was once introduced to him, and as he shook hands he said: "I am the American Shalom Aleichem." Pat came the retort, "And I am the Yiddish Mark Twain." Shalom Aleichem spent last summer in Badenweiler, a lovely resort in the Black Forest, and went to Basle with his family for the festivals. The local community did all it could to show honour to the distinguished guest, and a special seat was reserved for him in the synagogue. On the day after New Year, our representative writes, I met him in his hotel, writing as he usually is.

Shalom Aleichem's Latest Work.

What are you writing now? I asked.

"I always write sketches for Yiddish papers appropriate to the festivals, and I am overwhelmed with requests for work of this sort. For the last twenty years, on every Yomtov that God gives us, I have discharged this honourable task. I always describe pictures from Jewish life *apropos* of the particular festival. I am now at work on sketches for Succoth which I have to finish this week. For the *דאס נורא'ס* this year I described various types of the *נורא'ס* prayer. I stored up so many and such varied experiences in my childhood that if I devote my whole life to the task I shall never be able to describe them all. Besides I shan't live long."

Oh, why not? I interrupted. You are looking very well.

"Yes, but I don't put much trust in life. However, during the time that is vouchsafed to me I work industriously according to a fixed plan which I drew up. I write steadily every day. I have made short sketches in a note-book of what I want to write, and I have more material there than will suffice for my life."

"Recently," Shalom Aleichem went on, "I completed a larger work entitled 'Wandering Stars,' which extends to fifty sheets and to which I have devoted two years' work. It will first appear in America and constitutes the third part of my trilogy. 'Ruchele,' the first part, had a musician as hero. It is a tale of a youth who cannot let go of his bow and fiddle and wins everyone's heart by his playing. It is partly autobiographical. The second part, 'Nightingales,' apotheosises the Chazonim, and now the third part describes the *milieu* of Jewish artists. In 'Wandering Stars' there are thirty-six heroes, each with his own sorrows and idiosyncrasies. My types seem, it is true, always somewhat ridiculous, but they nevertheless arouse the sympathies of the reader, and that is the chief thing."

Future Plans.

What are your projects for the future?

"I am a permanent contributor to Yiddish papers in Russia and New York, and this alone absorbs a considerable portion of my activity. Then, in the near future I intend writing a comedy which will depict the different extremes of Jewish education. Yiddish literature has made great progress in the last decade. It has been statistically proved that the number of readers has grown enormously; hence the Jewish public is able to stand the most notable writers *בכבוד*."

Tell me something about your youth. How long have you been writing?

"When I was a boy I was a very good pupil, and it was said of me that I should become a *גדול ב'ש'אל*. But that never came off! I cannot remember a time when I wasn't writing. Even in the *cheder* as a fourteen-year-old boy I wrote an alphabetical vocabulary of the words that I had learnt in the Bible and Talmud. It was as much to me as though I had discovered America, for I had never seen an encyclopaedia or dictionary in my life. When I had finished the work I showed it to my father. But he said to me *נבר קרמנון אחרים*. In a passion I threw the manuscript away."

A Jewish Robinson Crusoe.

What was your next literary effort?

"A little later on I wrote the history of a Jewish Robinson Crusoe, a pious Jew who had lost his way in the desert. It was a colossal piece of stupidity, and I am happy that it never saw the light of print. When I was eighteen I began to write for Hebrew papers and I soon perceived that humorous writing was my forte. When, at the age of twenty-three, I came to the conclusion that I must write in the language that the whole people understands, in Yiddish, *כאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו*. I did not dare, out of consideration for my father, to write Yiddish under my real name. I, therefore, sought a pseudonym, and what was simpler than to append to my name of Shalom the little word Aleichem?"

How did your writing tend to the humorous?

"The language itself is humorous and lively. There is something in it that provokes laughter. No other language possesses this characteristic. And the situations that occur in Jewish life in Russia present as many humorous sides

as the language. Whoever really learns to know Jewish life in the diaspora must laugh and cry at the same time."

Do you also write serious things?

"But my humour is serious. It is possible to treat serious things and humorous things seriously. Jewish humour has this peculiar dash with tears."

A Curious Correspondence.

Shalom Aleichem told me what enthusiastic greetings he received from emigrants passing through Basle when they heard he was in the town, and he had to promise them that he would write them.

"It is remarkable," he continued, "that I correspond not only with friends, but with a large number of Jews who are strangers to me. Letters that I receive are real curiosities. A *בנות* writes to me, 'I shall get married; a girl wants to know whether she should go to Russia, or go to Palestine. Another correspondent asks whether *בנות* of his town (the name of which I had never previously heard of) is as the characterisation fitted exactly. Another seeks my opinion on the question: 'הי'ש אלהים בארץ?' And the worst of it is that to every letter he has another *שאלה*."

What do you think of the relation of the Yiddish language to Hebrew? Do you think that Hebrew will gradually take the place of Yiddish?

"I am no Yiddish Chauvinist, like the men of Czernowitz, who hold the opinion that Yiddish is at present the only national language—*בית*—but one which, with its history extending over a long period, has a certain justification. It must never think of contesting the supremacy of Hebrew, the original vernacular, the use of which has been maintained by force of circumstances. But we must reckon with these changes. Everywhere, where Jews live together, Yiddish is spoken, and in the future will, I think, subsist for centuries to come. How persistent is the clinging to Yiddish is shown by the fact that in England and America, particularly, Hebrew is not learned, and Hebrew is not the vernacular. Hebrew certainly has a future, but chiefly in the East. Hebrew may in the near future be recognised as an official language, and already write letters to their Hebrew addresses. It is ridiculous now to go to Palestine knowing Hebrew. Only I tend that there would be a great deal between Hebrew and Yiddish, that Hebrew is making progress implies a return to Jewish as formerly only a few people now a great many do so, and the number is palpably increasing, all to the good."

Some Translations.

Do you write your works in Yiddish?

"Chiefly. But I also write in Russian. A considerable part of my works has been translated into Hebrew by my son-in-law. With all other translations my writings suffers, but in the case with Hebrew. A considerable part of my works were even translated into Esperanto by Dr. Zamenhof of the language. He too found Yiddish could be translated into Esperanto the language."

Shalom Aleichem always avoided using the term *יהודים*, because, he said, the term *יהודים* justice be applied to Yiddish. He would not speak about the language in which Shalom Aleichem writes with great interest. He asked me whether he was satisfied with the results of the Congress, he said that the time would come when forgiveness would be sought. We then spoke of the

assassination, which deeply affected Shalom Aleichem, as he had known the murderer in Kieff.

"I know the family of the murderer very well," he said; "my grandfather and were great friends. The grandfather of the murderer had been baptised. The father, however, a lawyer by profession, was of the Jewish fold. But he took no interest in Jewish affairs. The children were given Jewish religious instruction, nor ever spoke a word about Jewish law. Jews are made responsible for such occurrences. That the murderer was a little boy. I have the greatest sympathy with the parents, who are honest people. The news of the speedy trial and of the execution affected me. I firmly believe that Bogroff was forced to commit the deed in order to rehabilitate himself, this furnishes once more a proof of the old Yiddish saying: 'with one hand and heals with the other.' We were all stunned when the murderer was born a Jew. It is a piece of good fortune that the secret police, and was a *provocateur* of Azeff's *קור*, so that he received this blow from the Russian police itself."

Do you believe that there will be any evil consequences?

"No. A pogrom at this moment would be a death-blow to the Jewish people. Europe would be convinced that the Tsar is at the head of the pogrom. Every excess would be regarded as an act of revolution. A revolution might easily be produced."

Did you read that a student had been beaten by the anti-Semites in Kieff?

"Yes, it is quite a harmless affair, but there we see the irony of fate. This student. He is called Lipschitz. He is a fellow-student of mine. He is no Jew at all. His father was baptised. He blessed the son with an extra large-sized Jewish nose. So he was taken for a Jew and been beaten. He forgot to leave his nose at home."

The Present Situation in Russia.

What do you think of the present situation in Russia?

"It is worse now than ever before. The Government has reached a benevolent conclusion that passive pogroms are much better



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Do you also write serious things? "But my humour is serious. It is possible to treat serious things humorously and humorous things seriously. Jewish humour has this peculiarity, that it is dashed with tears."

A Curious Correspondence.

Shalom Aleichem told me what enthusiastic greetings he received from emigrants passing through Basle when they heard he was in the town. They told him their life stories, and he had to promise them that he would describe their experiences.

"It is remarkable," he continued, "that I correspond not only with colleagues and friends, but with a large number of Jews who are strangers to me. The letters that I receive are real curiosities. A woman writes to me, to ask whether I shall get married; a girl wants to know whether she should study medicine in Russia, or go to Palestine. Another correspondent asks whether I mean to return to his town (the name of which I had never previously heard of) in one of my stories, as the characterisation fitted exactly. Another seeks my opinion on a question: 'הייש אלהים בארץ?' And the worst of it is that to every answer I give him he has another question."

What do you think of the relation of the Yiddish language to Hebrew? Do you think that Hebrew will gradually take the place of Yiddish?

"I am no Yiddish Chauvinist, like the men of Czernowitz. But I am of opinion that Yiddish is at present the only national language—true, only a national class language—but one which, with its history extending over 1,000 years, has a certain justification. It must never think of contesting the superior claim of Hebrew, the original vernacular, the use of which has become lost to it by force of circumstances. But we must reckon with these circumstances. Everywhere, where Jews live together, Yiddish is spoken, and this state of affairs will, I think, subsist for centuries to come. How persistently the clinging to Yiddish is shown by the emigrants in England and America. In America, particularly, Hebrew has no prospects. Only the intelligent Jews learn Hebrew and are able to use it as a vernacular. Hebrew certainly has a future, but chiefly in Palestine. Hebrew may in the near future be recognised as an official language, and already write letters to Palestine in Hebrew addresses. It is more ridiculous now to go to Palestine not knowing Hebrew. Only fools could pretend that there would be any competition between Hebrew and Yiddish. The progress that Hebrew is making shows that it implies a return to Judaism. It was formerly only a few read Hebrew, now a great many do so, and their number is palpably increasing. And this is all to the good."

Some Translations.

Do you write your works in Yiddish?

"Chiefly. But I also write in English and Russian. A considerable part of my works has been translated into Hebrew by my son-in-law, Ben-Zion. With all other translations the human part of my writings suffers, but it is not the case with Hebrew. A short time ago my works were even translated into Esperanto by Dr. Zamenhof, the creator of the language. He told me that he found Yiddish could be better translated in Esperanto than any other language."

Shalom Aleichem always has carefully avoided using the word "pogrom" because, he said, the term could not be applied to Yiddish. He has refused to speak about the last Zionist Congress in which Shalom Aleichem took part with great interest. When asked him whether he was satisfied with the results of the Congress, he said he did not know the time would come when forgiveness would be sought.

We then spoke of the assassination, which deeply affected Shalom Aleichem, as he himself said in Kieff.

"I know the family of the murderer very well," he said; "we lived together years ago and were great friends. The grandfather of the murderer had been baptised. The father, however, a lawyer by profession, returned to the Jewish fold. But he took no interest in Jewish affairs. The children never received Jewish religious instruction, nor ever spoke a word about Jewish matters. Jews are made responsible for such occurrences. That the murderer was a Jew I had never heard of; I knew the other sons were. I remember having seen him as a little boy. I have the greatest sympathy with the parents, who were honest people. The news of the speedy trial and execution affected me. I firmly believe that Bogroff was forced by the revolutionaries to commit the deed in order to rehabilitate himself. This furnishes once more a proof of the old Yiddish saying: 'Gott mit uns, und er wird uns erretten mit einer Hand und heilt uns mit der anderen.' We were all stunned by the news that the murderer was born a Jew. It is a piece of good fortune that he had not been taken by the secret police, and was a promoter of Azeff's party, so that Russian Jews received this blow from the Russian police itself."

Do you believe that there will be any evil consequences? "No. A pogrom at this moment would be a death-blow to the Government. Europe would be convinced that the Tsar is at the head of the pogrom. Every excess would be regarded as an act of revolution. A pogrom is certainly in the interests of the revolutionaries, because out of the revolution might easily be produced."

Did you read that a student had been beaten by the anti-Jewish mob in Kieff?

"Yes, it is quite a harmless affair, but there we see the irony of fate. This student. He is called Lipschitz. He is a fellow-student of my son. The joke of it is that he is no Jew at all. His father was baptised. But God blessed the son with an extra large-sized Jewish nose. So he had to be taken for a Jew and been beaten. He forgot to leave his nose at home."

The Present Situation in Russia.

What do you think of the present situation in Russia?

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more readily than the others which attract the eyes of the world. Why do you not make a noise to kill anyone when they can annihilate him quietly. At the present time it was possible to protest and appeal to the conscience of the Government on Russian finance. This is now impossible."

Do you think the situation will improve under the new Government? "I don't care for these political pilpulim. But I will say this: I don't care for the new Premier. He is an educated man and no pronounced anti-Semite. He is also opposed to the latest plan of Stolypin to nationalise the capital. The chief thing is to convince the Government that they must do something with the aid of the Black Hundreds. I have a slight hope in the new régime. God grant that I am not mistaken."

What do you think of the anti-Jewish disturbances in Wales? "The news profoundly disquieted me, and I believe Zangwill was right in saying that this occurrence would cost England dearer than the Jews. I am ashamed, and I wish the world could forget this day."

Russian Writers and the Blood Libel.

"And now," said Shalom Aleichem, "I have something pleasant to tell you. I know that the horrible blood libel has wrought so much mischief in Russia, and spread in Kieff and elsewhere. It is also to occupy the attention of the Duma during next session. It is very difficult for Jews themselves to deal with their enemies. I therefore asked Gorki and Amphytheatroff, who I had previously approached the greatest Christian writers and publicists in Russia, to approach the Government to secure from them a protest against the shameful blood-libel. I also secured from them a united and public manifesto proving historically and scientifically the baselessness of this attack on the Jews. They agreed to my proposal, and I have already dealt with the matter in the Press. The protest will appear in the next issue of the paper, and will be published widespread so as to enlighten the lower classes of the people. I hope that this will be very useful."

How long have you left Russia?

"The pogrom period of 1905 I spent in Kieff. Then I undertook a tour in England, America, and Australia. Three years ago I was taken ill suddenly, and had to hasten to Italy and since then I have spent the winter in the South and the summer in the Black Forest. My health is now restored. I shall spend this winter in Montreux. In the spring I intend to visit Palestine in order to give some Hebrew recitals there. In 1908 I celebrated the 25th anniversary of the opening of my career as a writer. I there received so many expressions of goodwill from near and far that I contributed not a little to my recovery. I am very pleased to have the opportunity of conveying my greetings to my numerous friends in England. Now I am over fifty years old," he concluded sadly.

"I am content," said Shalom Aleichem.

WILLS.

£30,000 FOR CHARITIES.

Mrs. Charlotte Maude Barnato, of 74, Royal Parade, Eastbourne, who died on July 22nd last, leaving a net estate of the value of £37,908. Probate of her will has been granted to Mr. Henry J. Phillips, of 10, St. Petersburg Place, Bayswater; the Rev. Dr. J. Jacobs, of 66, Middle Street, Brighton; and Mr. Alphonse Barnato, of Upper Hamilton Terrace, to each of whom for the executorships she has bequeathed £100 each to Mrs. Humphrey Phillips and her children, £200 to Mrs. Hugo Warner, and £100 to each of her children, Ethel, and Ernest; £100 each to the wife and the unmarried daughter, Mrs. Rev. Abraham Charles Jacobs; £200 each to Eddie Abrahams and his wife; £50 each to Jackie, Alfred, Edward, and Morris, sons of the said Mrs. Jacobs; and two diamond brooches to Mrs. S. G. Asher. Testatrix: Mrs. Charlotte Maude Barnato. Legacies: £1,000 to the London Hospital for the Women's Ward; £1,000 to the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women; £1,000 to the Cancer Hospital for the Women's Ward; £1,000 to the St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, for the Women's Ward; £1,000 to the Samaritan Women's Hospital, Marylebone Road; £1,000 to the Children's Hospital, Paddington Green; £1,000 to the Middlesex Hospital for the Children's Ward; £1,000 to the Little Sisters of the Poor, Nazareth House, Hammersmith; £1,000 to the Foundling Hospital, Guilford Street; £1,000 to the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street; £1,000 to the Jewish Hospital and Orphan Asylum; £1,000 to the Hospital for Women, Soho Square; £1,000 to the synagogue at St. Petersburg Place, Bayswater, to be applied for the purchase of a Sepher Torah and silver bells; £1,000 to the Rev. Abraham Charles Jacobs, for a like purchase; £1,000 to the Rev. Abraham Charles Jacobs, to be applied by him, in his discretion, for the benefit of Jewish poor at Brighton; £1,000 to the Jewish Society of the Promoters of Charity; £1,000 to the Sick Room Helps Society, Whitechapel; £1,000 to the Home for Aged Jews.

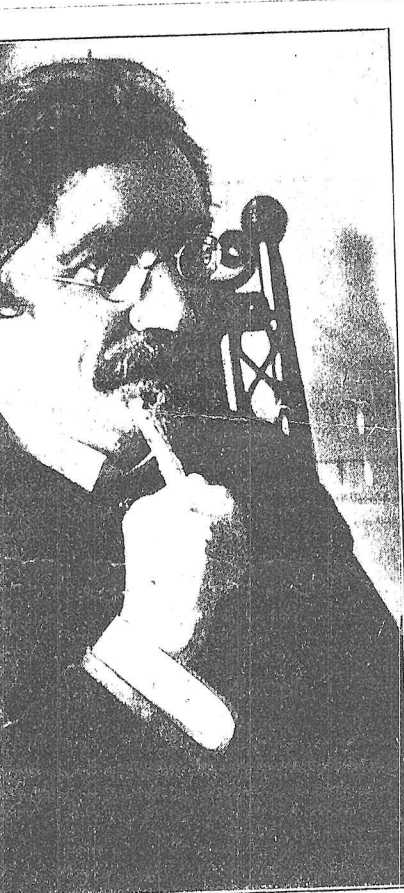
The above legacies are free of duty, and subject to these provisions the residue of her property, amounting to over £20,000, "upon the same in equal or unequal proportions, at the absolute discretion of the executors, amongst any charitable institutions wherever situate and existing, for the benefit of women and children."

The will of the late Mr. Harry Isaacs Barnato, of 23, Upper Hamilton Terrace, who died on November 30th, 1908, leaving property sworn to be worth £25,500,000 at least, Mrs. Barnato inherited the leasehold house at Upper Hamilton Terrace, and all his effects there, together with a life annuity of £1,000 per annum.

ALEXANDER.—Miss Sarah Lindo Alexander, of 10, Hanover Square, who left estate of the gross value of £16,059, gave £25 each to the Board of Deputies, out of regard for her brother, who is its President; £100 to the Board of Guardians; Jewish Home for Incurables; Jewish Hospital for the Incurables; Jewish Religious Education Board; £10 to her former servant, and £5 to each servant of one year's service.

HAST.—The Rev. Marcus Hast, of Pyrland Road, Canonbury, died on the 10th inst., leaving property valued at £642.

THE JEWISH WORKING SCHOOL AND ALEXANDRA ORPHANA.—The 153rd anniversary dinner of this institution will be held on Wednesday, the 15th November, at the Savoy Hotel. The programme has been issued, and Sir Edward states: "In this great coronation year the funds of this splendid institution may be put on a firm basis, and contributions may be secured, so that legacies, which have hitherto been a source of anxiety, may in future be funded, gradually building up a sure source of income. £25,000 has to be collected each year to meet current expenditure. The children who are entirely maintained and given a good elementary education have no parents, some have only one; there is no other form of support so much to our feelings. Only think, poor little helpless children of the world."



SHALOM ALEICHEM.

