

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 ימים נוראים this year I described various types of the כוונתה 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 ברכור."

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 גריל בשיאל. 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 כבד קדמון אהרים. 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 רשותו. 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 and the Jewish 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 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 ברוך 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 leave my town (the name of which I had never previously heard of) in one of the stories, as the characterisation fitted exactly. Another seeks my opinion on a question: 'היט אלהים בארץ?' And the worst of it is that to every answer I give him 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. But I am of opinion that Yiddish is at present the only national language—true, only a lower 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 us 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 Yiddish language is shown by the statistics in England and America. In America, particularly, Hebrew has no prospects. Only the intelligent Jews learn Hebrew and be 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 without knowing Hebrew. Only fools could pretend that there would be any competition between Hebrew and Yiddish. The progress implies a return to Judaism, as formerly only a few read Hebrew, now a great many do so, and their number is palpably increasing. And that is all to the good."

Some Translations.

Do you write your works in Yiddish?

"Chiefly. But I also write in Hebrew and Russian. A considerable portion of my works has been translated into Hebrew by my son-in-law, Ben-Zion. With all other translations the humor 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 inventor of the language. He told me that he found Yiddish could be better translated in Esperanto than any other language."

Shalom Aleichem always has avoided using the word "Jew" because, he said, the term could not be justly applied to Yiddish. When he went on to speak about the last Zionist Congress in which Shalom Aleichem took part with great interest. When he was asked whether he was satisfied with the results of the Congress, he said he thought the time would come when forgiveness would be sought.

We then spoke of the assassination, which deeply affected Shalom Aleichem, as he himself called it, 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; I knew the other sons were. I remember having seen him as a little boy. I have the greatest sympathy with the parents, who are 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. I see, this furnishes once more a proof of the old Yiddish saying: 'God with one hand and heals with the other.' We were all stunned by the news that the murderer was born a Jew. It is a piece of good fortune that he was not the secret police, and was a provocateur of Azeff's קורר, so that Russian society 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 would certainly be 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 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 has been 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 than



"SHALOM ALEICHEM."

A Sermon

[Specially written for the occasion]

JUDAISM

"On the eighth day he set out into their tents joyful and glad, David his servant and to Israel..."

"Joyful and glad of the heart to strike the keynote of the Festival days, and not of that celebratory Jewish religion. They give thanks that have made the Jew what he is, that present themselves to him as loves to dwell on the dark side of disappointment, the sense of loss as the predominant experience with sadness. Its attention is not on the treasure, whose hearts rejoice in it. For them the world is living so far transcends its incidents of life in part, and that whole is faultless. It is the optimistic view of the world stands at the foundation of Jewish philosophy. Schopenhauer, the mode of thought, was greatly influenced by his remarks that the fundamental monotheism or polytheism is pessimism. And he adds that the New Testament and the New Testament is concerned with the Festival, when, having completed, shall open the Bible again. God saw all that He had done, the philosophy of optimism is taken up, persists all through the Old Testament (Eccl. 1:2). Psalms as rare as they are, remind that there can be a day upon it through the medium of the Lord for He is good for ever, His loving-kindnesses of the Father, He hath bestowed on man."

This predominant note of Bible, is the outcome of nothing if it be not the expression of all things for a better world, of which we call the features of life we call the future. He should slay me, yet the Israelite's expression have been able to shake the expiring breath of his tongue. In the midst of bereavement calamities have surged and a flood of misfortune have passed. "Blessed be the right offspring of this faith in which mankind had gradually reached a golden age had been such the prophets of Israel's future. Without shutting the good was destined towards that end, that themselves, that by its empire over the corner of the globe a earth be filled with the despair of the future of God Himself. That is to be wrapped in gloom, but cloud. "And may the daily prayer, his affirming passing waters of adversity a Sabbath of Comfort, set things. He could not get out appending to it some..."

We sometimes hear an idea of what it should be. It is said that little prayer. That is the best sense of the word. It is thanksgiving. Our hearts. We feel that, as our Saviour, the Lord, and to praise when it behoves us to do for forgiveness, our Prayer introspection. It rather "serve the Lord with a mourner's prayer is a columns touched upon promised in the Mosaic prosperity. The rain is..."

...arns to know Jewish life and...me time." ...is possible to treat serious things...ewish humour has this peculiarity...

...s Correspondence. ...at enthusiastic greetings he received...en they heard he was in the town...to promise them that he would...

...ed, "that I correspond not only with...number of Jews who are strangers to...ities. A 7777 writes to me, to ask...know whether she should study...her correspondent asks whether I...h I had never previously heard of...d exactly. Another seeks my opinion...and the worst of it is that to every...tion of the Yiddish language to Hebrew...ally take the place of Yiddish? ...st, like the men of Czernowitz. ...the only national language—true, only...with its history extending over 1,000...ever think of contesting the superiority...r, the use of which has become...at we must reckon with these other...together, Yiddish is spoken, and...centuries to come. How persistently...cling to Yiddish is shown by...tions in England and America, ...particularly, Hebrew has...prospects. Only the intelligent...learn Hebrew and be able to...vernacular. Hebrew certainly...future, but chiefly in Palestine...Hebrew may in the near...recognised as an official...already write letters to Palestine...Hebrew addresses. It is...ridiculous now to go to Palestine...knowing Hebrew. Only fools...tend that there would be any...between Hebrew and Yiddish...that Hebrew is making...gress implies a return to Judaism...as formerly only a few...now a great many do so, and...her is palpably increasing...all to the good."

Some Translations

Do you write your works in Yiddish? "Chiefly. But I also write in English and Russian. A considerable number of my works has been translated into Hebrew by my son-in-law. With all other translations of my writings suffers, but it is the case with Hebrew. A number of my works were even translated into Esperanto by Dr. Zamenhof, the inventor of the language. He told me that he found Yiddish could be translated into Esperanto than any other language."

Shalom Aleichem always avoided using the word "murder" because, he said, the term "justice" be applied to Yiddish. He would not speak about the language in which Shalom Aleichem made progress with great interest. He asked me whether he was mentioned in the results of the Congress, and he said the time would come when his forgiveness would be sought for."

We then spoke of the murder of Shalom Aleichem, as he himself had been affected. "I was very much affected by the murder very well," he said; "we were all very much affected. The grandfather of the murderer, however, a lawyer by profession, had no interest in Jewish affairs. The children of the murderer, nor ever spoke a word about Jewish matters for such occurrences. That the murderer was the other sons were. I remember having the greatest sympathy with the parents. The news of the speedy trial and execution of the deed in order to rehabilitate the name of the old Yiddish saying 'a more proof of the old Yiddish saying 'with the other.' We were all stunned by a Jew. It is a piece of good fortune that he was a provocateur of Azeff's 7777, so that the Russian police itself." ...there will be any evil consequences? ...this moment would be a death-blow to...priced that the Tsar is at the head of the...regarded as an act of revolution. A pogrom...sts of the revolutionaries, because out of...be produced." ...a student had been beaten by the anti-

...harmless affair, but there we see the irony...called Lipschitz. He is a fellow-student of...no Jew at all. His father was baptised. ...an extra large-sized Jewish nose. So...been beaten. He forgot to leave his nose at... The Present Situation in Russia. ...nk of the present situation in Russia? ...w than ever before. The Government... that passive pogroms are much better...

...than the others which attract the eyes of the world. Why need they...to kill anyone when they can annihilate him quietly. Against the...it was possible to protest and appeal to the conscience of Europe, or...Russian finance. This is now impossible." ...think the situation will improve under the new Government? ...care for these political pilpulim. But I will say this: We may...new Premier. He is an educated man and no pronounced anti-Jew. He...opposed to the latest plan of Stolypin to nationalise the capital of the...The chief thing is to convince the Government that they cannot do...with the aid of the Black Hundreds. I have a slight hope in a coming...God grant that I am not mistaken." ...do you think of the anti-Jewish disturbances in Wales? ...news profoundly disquieted me, and I believe Zangwill was right when...that this occurrence would cost England dearer than the Jews. I am...amed, and I wish the world could forget this day.

Russian Writers and the Blood Libel

"I have something pleasant to tell you. ...that the horrible blood libel has wrought so much mischief and is still...in Kieff and elsewhere. It is also to occupy the attention of the...ing next session. It is very difficult for Jews themselves to contend...enemies. I therefore asked Gorki and Amphitheatroff, who both reside...approach the greatest Christian writers and publicists in Russia with a...ing from them a protest against the shameful blood-libel, and the...of a united and public manifesto proving historically and scientifically...of this attack on the Jews. They agreed to my proposal, and have...with the matter in the Press. The protest will appear in the winter, ...published widespread so as to enlighten the lower classes of the people...this will be very useful." ...long have you left Russia? ...pogrom period of 1905 I spent in Kieff. Then I undertook a journey to...England and America. Three years ago I was taken ill suddenly while...tour in Russia. I had to hasten to Italy and since then I have spent...in the South and the summer in the Black Forest. My health is now...I shall spend this winter in Montreux. In the spring I shall start...to Palestine in order to give some Hebrew recitals there. In 1908, on the...of the 25th anniversary of the opening of my career as a writer I stayed...I there received so many expressions of goodwill from near and far that...tributed not a little to my recovery. I am very pleased to have this...of conveying my greetings to my numerous friends in England and...Now I am over fifty years old," he concluded sadly. ...I replied. ...content," said Shalom Aleichem.

WILLS.

£30,000 FOR CHARITIES.

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

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

Miss Sarah Lindo Alexander, of 10, Hanover Terrace, who left estate of the gross value of £16,059, gave £25 each to the Deputies, out of regard for her brother, who is its President; £25 each to the Deputies of Guardians; Jewish Home for Incurables; Jewish Hospital and Dispensary at Norwood; Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Bevis Marks; Jewish Religious Education Board; £10 to her former servant, Marian; and £5 to each servant of one year's service.

The Rev. Marcus Hast, of Pyrland Road, Canonbury, died intestate, leaving property valued at £642.

WORKING SCHOOL AND ALEXANDRA ORPHANAGE.—Sir Edward has promised to preside at the 153rd anniversary dinner of this institution, which will be held on Wednesday, the 15th November, at the Savoy Hotel. In the programme has issued, Sir Edward states: In this great coronation year it is a pleasure to see the funds of this splendid institution may be put on a firm basis, and that the future be funded, gradually building up a sure source of income. At present £25,000 has to be collected each year to meet current expenditure. There are 1,000 children who are entirely maintained and given a good elementary education. We have no parents, some have only one; there is no other form of charity which does so much to our feelings. Only think, poor little helpless children cast upon the mercy of the world.