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A QUARTER OF A CENTURY'S SERVICE

BY DR. LUDWIG B. BERNSTEIN

"DO YOU know, Doctor, that it is just thirty years ago that I heard you lecture on Heinrich Heine at the Educational Alliance in New York," casually remarked Philip L. Seman, of Chicago, a few months ago when we were reminiscing; to which remark I responded by saying, "And do you know that on March 1, 1928, it will have been twenty-five years since I entered Jewish social work as the superintendent of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum of New York?" I am mentioning this incident because it recalls vividly to my mind the day nearly twenty-five years ago when I entrusted Philip Seman with the then unheard of task of starting club work and social activities in an orphan asylum, representing the most dilapidated and the worst possible example of a barrack institution. There were nearly eight hundred children at that time, herded together like cattle under one roof, this number having been reduced from an original group of nine hundred and fifty. (One hundred and fifty children were discharged because of an epidemic of ring-worm of the scalp.)

How did it come about that I suddenly found myself transferred from a successful and promising educational career, and from a comfortable cottage in Flushing, L. I., to a Jewish orphanage? My immediate predecessor was an honorable gentleman whose main function seemed to consist in taking care of the petty cash, who prided himself on having saved to the institution $20,000 a year for several years past, and who by training and inclination was a typical German bookkeeper. He strongly dissuaded me from taking up Jewish communal work. I am still not quite sure about all the details, but I do have a definite recollection of the main causes that led to the radical change in my career. But in order to make that more intelligible to the reader and to my colleagues I have to go back to still earlier days of my life.

IN MY own parental home in Mitau, Courland, being one of five sons everyone of whom had attended either the *Gymnasium* or the *Realschule,* I had the great advantage of being the favorite of an older brother, whose rugged honesty, keen intellect and intense Jewishness affected me profoundly. But unfortunately my home was not strictly orthodox, in the same degree that many of my older colleagues who hail from Russia and other Eastern European countries had experienced. Although my father held the office of an associate rabbi and *schochet,* he was orthodox merely in form, but deep down in his heart he was a liberal and he made no bones about it when speaking to his children. He thoroughly detested his communal job, and in his leisure time fairly devoured a German encyclopedia. My two older brothers had attended a *Yeshivah* because it was expected of a man of rabbinical standing to have his sons educated in the *Yeshivah,* but neither my third brother nor myself nor my younger brother were obliged to do so and, as a consequence, my Hebraic training was sadly neglected. In fact, even my experience in the *cheder* was rather hectic. My *melamed* once having insulted and abused his wife in the presence of the class, I absolutely refused to return to the *cheder,* and neither my father nor my mother could persuade me to continue under the same teacher. Since there were no other teachers available, my formal Jewish training was thus abruptly ended, at least for the major part of my school life. In the upper grades of the Classical *Gymnasium* I had the good fortune of receiving some Jewish ethical instruction from the late Rabbiner Dr. Pucher, who was the governmentally accredited rabbi in our district.

Meager as my Jewish equipment was, I followed *nolens-volens,* the example of every half-decent Jewish boy in the upper forms of the *Gymnasium* in the pretense of being an agnostic or an atheist, not to be outdone by the Protestant students who represented the majority. The relationship of the Jewish boys to the non-Jewish students was socially and otherwise very friendly and continued to be friendly almost to a point of intimacy up to the time of the graduation ("Abiturium") from the Classical Gymnasium, one of the leading secondary schools, patterned after the very best German educational institutions and manned by some outstanding teachers from Germany and the Baltic provinces. Wherever in Russia the language of culture and social intercourse was German, as in Courland, the growing youth was more German than the Germans themselves, and this in spite of the fact, or possibly because of the fact, that the Russian educational authorities attempted their utmost to Russianize the school system in the Baltic region. I had been a very fair student in languages and literatures, and that meant not merely in German but in Latin and Greek as well. The shock of my early life came—and that is why I emigrated—when upon graduation from the *Gymnasium,* in answer to my application for admission to the Lazarev Institute for Oriental languages, I received a categorical answer in the negative. The Jews of Courland, being somewhat sheltered, had not experienced to the full limit the brutality of the Russian discriminatory laws. The blunt statement of fact that I was ineligible for admission to a higher institution of learning solely on the ground of my Jewish faith had the very natural effect of arousing in me my Jewish consciousness and a profound regret that I had neglected being a Jew. My mind was made up to leave Russia for a country more hospitable to the Jew and, incidentally, I resolved to start *de novo* my Jewish studies as soon as I would be able to do so. Practically at the same time that I left my parental home, my older as well as my younger brother emigrated, the former to England, the latter to France. I myself decided to follow the larger stream of Jewish emigration to America, much to the chagrin of my parents, who were anxious for me to join my younger brother in France.

Contrary to my anticipations, my days of struggle during the first few years of life in New York were very brief indeed. I was sensible enough, immediately upon my arrival in New York, to learn negative retouching, and after joining forces with some expert retouchers, I undertook the job of securing work and supervising it. We soon developed adequate trade and employment and I was able in less than one year's time to enter the School of Philosophy of Columbia University.

I shall always consider it a great privilege to have been favored with the friendship of the late Dr. Gustave Gottheil, the renowned rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, New York, whose son, Professor Richard Gottheil, was the head of the Semitic Department at Columbia. True to the promise I had given myself, I decided, quite irrespective of my specialty, to take up Hebrew. Under Dr. Gottheil's inspiring tuition I not only carried a number of courses in Isaiah and in other prophets, but also became interested in Arabic. However, my two main lines of study at Columbia University were in philosophy and education under Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler—at that time Dean of the School of Philosophy—and in the field of Germanic languages and literatures where I came under the stimulating influence of Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, the eminent commentator of Goethe's Faust, who was also an authority on German, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish literatures.

AS I look back upon my years of graduate work at Columbia University I cannot help feeling that I fairly gobbled up the courses offered, even though they covered a very wide range and seemed rather heterogenous. The late Boyesen was anxious for me to take up academic teaching, and with this end in view he sent me with a warm personal letter of introduction and a very flattering recommendation to the first President of the new University of Chicago, the late Dr. William Rainey Harper. Dr. Emil Hirsch in particular wished that I remain at the University, where I was offered a "docentship." At that time a docentship did not carry much compensation with it, and it was certainly not sufficient to enable a young fellow without means to get along. I therefore regretfully de-

clined the docentship in Goethe's Faust and decided to return to New York, to accept a much more lucrative position of instructor of modern languages in the elementary schools. At that time the teaching of German and French in the grammar school grades had a more or less precarious educational status. It was taught not on the basis of a curricular necessity and because of educational-philosophical considerations, but as a more or less political concession to the large German element in New York. I had just started teaching when Dr. William H. Maxwell, a truly brilliant educator, the first city superintendent of schools of Greater New York, called a conference of the modern language teachers in order to discuss policies and methods. On that occasion I gave expression to the thought that no subject had a *raison d'etre* in the school system merely as a political expedient, and that it would be by far better and more honest and courageous to eliminate it from the elementary schools altogether. I argued that point at considerable length, emphasizing the educational value of early linguistic training. A few weeks later I was asked by the Modern Language Teachers' Association of New York to accept the presidency of their Association, which I was obliged to retain for a period of four years, long after I had been promoted from the elementary schools system to a much more important position.

There had been a movement on foot in New York to open the first three high schools, and competitive examinations had been called to fill the various positions. I had the rare distinction of being one of the few Jewish candidates at that time to pass the examination, and I was appointed instructor at the DeWitt Clinton High School, where I taught Latin, Greek and German.

The new high schools were a great success. The demand for additional facilities and teachers led in January, 1903, to the first competitive examinations for the position of vice-principal of the high schools in New York (the position being technically known as "first assistantship"). I participated in these examinations and came out at the head of the entire eligible list.

Two weeks later Hon. Samuel D. Levy, for the past decade a highly esteemed judge of the Children's Court of New York, who was then the president of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum, sent for me and asked me whether I would care to consider the position of superintendent of his institution. There followed five of the most memorable and exciting weeks of my life, during which Dr. Maxwell himself, as well as some of the other leading educators, persuaded me to accept the offer. The Board met every reasonable condition. I stipulated that my wife was not to serve as the matron, and that I was to engage one myself, something unheard of in Jewish and non-Jewish orphanage work at that time. The Board of Trustees, comprised of an unusually fine lot of men, acceded even to this revolutionary condition. Yet I was apprehensive as to my ability to tackle the problem under conditions that were, to say the least, chaotic and far from promising; my predecessor at the Orphanage, the late Mr. Louis Fauerbach, discouraging me most earnestly and sincerely.

NEARLY sixteen years of my life, from March 1, 1903, were devoted to the service of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum. These years were co-extensive with a complete revolution in the field of general as well as Jewish child care. I had finally accepted the position with the definite understanding that it would not be long before the institution would be prepared to go out on the cottage home plan. There were no Jewish cottage home institutions at that time, and the non-Jewish cottage homes, with the sole exception of the one that was presided over by Dr. Reeder at Hastings-on-the-Hudson, did not seem to measure up to any reasonable educational conception. Homer Folks had preached a doctrine that the Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum ought to follow the example of the Reformatory at Rush, near Rochester, New York, where Franklin Briggs was conducting an experiment on a large scale in handling delinquent boys in widely scattered cottages, stressing agricultural training. Mr. Folks had enunciated the theory that there ought to be at least one acre for every child to be taken care of, and since we were originally contemplating the care of possibly one thousand children, it would have meant, had we literally followed his advice, the acquisition of a tremendous acreage hardly available near New York except at an unwarranted cost.

But I am anticipating. Let me come back for a minute to the few years spent in the old congregate institution. I referred to the fact that immediately before the time I entered upon my duties there was an epidemic of ring-worm of the scalp among the children. The boys and girls having been kept out of school for many months—there were no teachers in the institution itself—were naturally demoralized. Of the people that I found there, there was a fine manly chap, with a record of service in the Navy, who was in charge of the boys. Although personally good-natured, he was a martinet disciplinarian and attempted to carry into effect the most rigid military discipline. He was assisted by a young fellow, a graduate of another orphan asylum, who was distinctly of the moron type—a regular bully, and brutal in his relation to children. In charge of the girls were two inferior women who were despised by them. There was also a so-called Babies' Department, supervised by a woman whose status was really that of a maid, and whom I was obliged to discharge on my second day, because she was caught *in flagranti* entertaining a policeman in her "shed" in the evening, when she was on duty presumably looking after the sixty-five or seventy children under her care.

It did not take very long before there was a complete and radical change in the affairs of the old orphanage. Not only did I get a director of social activities, a position the first occupant of which, as I indicated before, was held by Philip Seman, but I quickly surrounded myself with a staff of men and women of education and culture. Seman was followed by Armand Wyle, who in his turn was

succeeded by Chester Teller, my first assistant superintendent. Much to the disgust of superintendents of other institutions, I threw doors and gates wide open to the admission of outside influences, and before long we had forty volunteers coming into the institution as club leaders, under the supervision of our director of social activities. When, following the introduction of school republics by Gill, I established a modified form of self-government for the boys and girls at the Orphanage, some of my colleagues thought that it was quixotic, and I am afraid that there was a lingering suspicion in the minds of one or two of them that it was a sort of an advertising stunt.

It must have been practically at the very time that I started my career as a social worker that Dr. Lee K. Frankel, following the modest example of Philadelphia, had made the very first beginning in placing certain types of dependent children in Jewish private homes in New York. Miss Sarah Michaels was in charge of them. Several adoptions had been negotiated, and a substantial number of children—if I recollect rightly, as many as thirty—had been placed in foster homes. I was much interested in that phase of child care, largely because of the repugnance I felt towards indiscriminate group life, resembling more or less a camp or barracks. So in the year 1906, twenty-two years ago, when Dr. Frankel, then the director of the United Hebrew Charities of New York, invited the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society for a conference, requesting that one of the two Orphanages take over the care of the boarded-out children, I prevailed upon my Board to accept the challenge. This was the beginning of the present Home Bureau of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society, which in a relatively short time increased the number of its children from thirty to one hundred and fifty, the present number of children being in the neighborhood of seven hundred. When at a meeting of the National Jewish Conference of Social Work in Philadelphia I pleaded in favor of foster home care as a supplementary method of child care, I was roundly denounced by the president of a Philadelphia orphanage as an "anarchist."

A WORD about the "Nine." It was indeed fortunate for the development of Jewish social work in New York that in those early days the professional heads of nine important organizations got together socially and professionally. The "Nine," although dubbed the "Charity Trust," were in reality for a number of years the only Jewish exponents of a truly professional conception of their work. If I am not mistaken, the original "Nine" included the late Dr. David Blaustein, Professor Sabsovich, Miss Rose Sommerfeld, Dr. Lee K. Frankel, followed by his successor, Morris D. Waldman, David Bressler, William Kahn (subsequently succeeded by Leonard Robinson), Dr. Rudolph I. Coffee (soon replaced by Dr. Solomon Lowenstein), Dr. Milton Reitzenstein, and the writer. I don't know what has become of the "Nine" during the last decade, but I do know that had it not been for the personal friendship and professional encouragement of men like Sol Lowenstein, Morris D. Waldman, Lee K. Frankel and Sabsovich, much of my work for the children of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum would probably have been undone.

Coming back now to the story of the Orphan Asylum. As early as 1907 we were beginning to discuss cottage home plans. It took nearly three years to select a suitable site, but when that was finally accomplished, we set to work not only on the structural plans, but on the new educational and social service projects. Would it be possible to transplant six hundred children (through a rigid investigation of the home conditions of many children we had reduced the number from eight hundred to six hundred) from strictly congregate conditions to cottage home life, without a period of transition? The glamour of Dr. Reeder's school that he had created as part of his institution, together with the delightful vista of untrammeled possibilities for creating a curriculum of our own, enabling our boys and girls to graduate from a complete high school course at the age of 15 (instead of 17 years), were directly responsible for the establishment of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum Elementary and High School. The brand new educational curriculum had been submitted to and approved by Professor Wilhelm Rhein of the University of Jena, one of the leading educational philosophers of his time, at whose feet Dean Russell and the MacMurrays of Teachers' College sat in the middle eighties. Upon my return from Europe where, after consultation with Professor Rhein, I also visited some of the leading Jewish orphan asylums, I set about methodically to carry into effect the educational-vocational, social, domestic and other practical arrangements for the cottage home plan. For this purpose I withdrew from the public school, one year prior to our moving, the older boys and the girls registered in the last three semesters of the elementary school, developing our own grammar and high school work while still living in the old institution. I selected for the principalship of our school, Michael Sharlitt, who also acted as our director of social activities. I even started the beginnings of a vocational school in the old institution, under Samuel Solender, who later became the principal of our technical schools in Pleasantville.

With the development of our own transitional school facilities for the older boys and girls we were enabled to teach them domestic science and arts in preparation for their work in Pleasantville. For nearly a year our boys and girls learned cooking and the care of a cottage in all its details. Half a year before our removal I had assembled twenty-odd cottage mothers, starting a regular training course for them. I had wisely reckoned that by the time we would get to Pleasantville we should probably have to eliminate a number of them, and this actually happened. But when we finally were ready, we had an original staff of eighteen well trained workers, who had received a substantial course not only in principles of cottage home life, but in principles of self-government,

social activities and child psychology as well. The result of it all was that on July 1, 1912, it was possible, though many people had characterized it as a fantastic proposition, bound to end in a huge fiasco—literally to move six hundred children from a congregate to a cottage home institution. On the evening of the very day of their arrival in Pleasantville the first meal was prepared by them, they all had been assigned to their classes either in the elementary school, high school or in the technical schools, they were familiar with their duties in the cottages, and each one of the cottage republics was functioning.

Many of the boys and girls, long since graduated from Pleasantville, are now men and women successful in life. I dare say that there are failures, but I have been too long removed from Pleasantville to know of them. Some of my former boys and girls come to see me in Pittsburgh; only recently an alumnus, representing a branch of the American Express Company, was discussing with me his happy boyhood days as cottage president and student at our high school.

ALTHOUGH no longer directly engaged in child welfare work, I have always maintained a soft spot for it. During my directorship of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research, nothing gave me greater pleasure than the opportunity I had of making child care surveys in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia. And ever since I have held the executive directorship of the Pittsburgh Jewish Federation, I have been indirectly identified with child welfare work, not only in connection with our own local Jewish social service program, but as a member, and for the last two years, as the chairman, of the Board of Visitation of Allegheny County, which is an inspectorial board set up by the County and charged with the duty of inspecting child caring and other institutions and agencies.

I have seen the pendulum in Jewish child care swinging from right to left and left to right, and since the famous White House Conference, in which I took part, I have seen more institutions going up than coming down. I have seen the Child Welfare League of America come into existence, representing possibly the only well balanced and authoritative body on child care in our country. I have witnessed much rhetoric in favor of one and in favor of the other method of child care. The further I am removed from direct work in the field of child welfare, the more I am convinced that the last word has not been said about the utilization of high-grade educationally conceived and socially administered institutions.

WHAT MADE ME A SOCIAL WORKER

BY DR. BORIS D. BOGEN

THE day is not far gone when the only prerequisite for one's entering the profession of Jewish social work was an inability to earn a livelihood at anything else. He was a business man without a business; a rabbi without a congregation; a cantor without a voice. He was a *schlemiel.* Fortunately I entered the field just at the end of this epoch of the "good old" standards. By that time the opinion prevailed that the qualifications of a social worker are innate; that a social worker, like a poet, is born and not made.

Evidently this view is also becoming obsolete. The new fashion of investigation penetrates the most obscure quarters of human endeavor; the query is put as to cause and effect; facts are analyzed, wholesome traditions are abandoned; nothing is taken for granted. In this particular instance this method of procedure is apt to lead to utter disillusionment. What if the soothing and comfortable notion of being "a chosen one," possessing special gifts from God, will have to be abandoned? What if the personal element in choosing the profession and the persistency of hanging on to it is reduced to a play of circumstances, to mere chance? But be that as it may, in the spirit of good comradeship and helpfulness, here comes my story.

I WAS born in the City of Moscow, Russia, in the year 1869. I do not recall any incident during my first ten years of existence that would justify the assumption that I was a prodigy, born for the field which was destined to be my calling during the rest of my life. However, I distinctly remember that at the age of ten I appeared before the Police Commissioner of the city in behalf of my aged nurse and obtained her admission into the Municipal Home for the Aged. My parents and friends commended me highly for my act, and the Commissioner himself favored me with a benevolent smile, which I think rarely made its appearance on his stern face.

At the age of thirteen I was thrown into contact with a group of intellectuals engaged in revolutionary activities. I was permitted to run errands for them and to perform rather dangerous tasks, such as carrying type, folding and distributing revolutionary literature, etc. Because of my youth I escaped the suspicion of the police. The close association with the heroes of the revolution, their devotion to their ideals, their unrelenting efforts and fearlessness in fighting for their cause, and their kindliness towards me endeared them to me, and I was thrilled with the privilege I enjoyed of being among them. I worshipped them as only a boy of my age could.

Within a few years the group went through a metamorphosis. One by one my friends disappeared. Many were removed by the police. Others weakened in their hopeless and dangerous task and deserted the ranks of the revolutionists. The government restrictions became more and more intense. The spy