



JOSEPH STOLZ

1861-1941

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By TOBIAS SCHANFARBER

On the tenth of December, 1937, as he was about to enter his home, Dr. Stolz had a fall in which he broke his hip-bone. He had to be carried upstairs to his room, and from that time until February 7, 1941, the day of his death, he was more or less of a helpless invalid.

Dr. Stolz was a little more than seventy-six years old at the time of this accident. He was born in Syracuse, New York, on November 3, 1861, the son of David and Regina Strauss Stolz. He attended the public schools of Syracuse, and was prepared for the Hebrew Union College by Rabbi Herman Birkenthal, who was at that time Rabbi of Society of Concord Congregation of Syracuse. He entered the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati in 1879, at the age of eighteen, and was graduated therefrom in 1884. In the same year, he was graduated from the University of Cincinnati with the degree of B. L. Two years prior to his graduation from the Hebrew Union College he had officiated during the High Holidays at Birmingham, Alabama. His first post as rabbi was with the B'nai Israel Congregation of Little Rock, Arkansas, which he left in 1887 to enter the pulpit of the Zion Congregation of Chicago as assistant to Dr. Bernard Felsenthal.

At that time there was an exodus of Jews from the West Side to the South Side of Chicago, and some of the best and most influential members of Zion Congregation joined in the movement. When Dr. Stolz saw the trend of things, he himself decided to move to the South Side, and form a congregation with his old West Side members as a nucleus. Isaiah Congregation grew rapidly and, within the space of a year, they were ready to build a Temple. This they did on the corner of Forty-fifth and Vincennes Avenue. The Temple, a large and commodious structure, was dedicated in 1896. It had a well-attended Sabbath School,

with large confirmation classes annually. It had also a large and flourishing Sisterhood, among the largest in the country, which maintained a scholarship at the Hebrew Union College and did religious and philanthropic work.

In 1921, there was some talk about a new Temple on the part of the members of Isaiah as well as members of Kehilath Anshe Mayriv, the first and oldest Congregation in Chicago. To forestall the possibility of two congregations building Temples in the same locality, where one would serve the purpose of both, an attempt was made to effect an amalgamation between these two congregations. Many meetings were held and at one time, it looked as though the project would come to a focus, but finally it failed to meet the approbation of the two Boards of the Congregation and the project of an amalgamation was dropped. An alliance was however effected between Temple, Israel and Isaiah Temple. When the two congregations joined their forces, they had a combined membership of 850 and there were a thousand members in the Sisterhood, but for some reason or other, the membership of the Congregation began to dwindle and, within the space of a year, the membership was reduced to 250.

On June 24, 1890, Dr. Stolz was married to Blanche A. Rauh of Cincinnati. Three children were born to them: two daughters and a son. Edna married Joseph Brody, a promising young lawyer of Des Moines, Iowa; Regina married Harry Greenebaum, a practicing physician in Chicago; and Leon is editorial writer for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Mrs. Stolz was a true helpmate, devoted to him and his work, and helpful to the Congregation. She was an ideal *Rebbetzin*.

In 1890, the Hebrew Union College conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity on Dr. Stolz. His thesis for the degree was on the subject of Funeral Agenda. In 1931, when Dr. Stolz reached the age of seventy, the College conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Hebrew Law, *honoris causa*.

He was essentially conservative in his thought because of his early upbringing amidst the conservative surroundings. His parents observed the traditional ceremonies in their home, and he early came under the saving influence of those two gentle conservative souls — Professor Sol-

omon Eppinger and Dr. Moses Millginer, who helped to shape and give direction to his mode of thinking. He read his prayers daily from a battered and tattered Minhag America, battered and tattered from excessive use. He introduced the Friday evening family dinner, at which his children were always present as well as a few close friends, and he conducted a regular Friday evening house service. He recited the grace following each meal. It irked him to see his colleagues smoke on the Sabbath, or travel on that day. While he introduced a Sunday Service as early as 1887, he always pleaded for the traditional Sabbath, and he had large congregations at the Saturday Service, even during the summer months.

Many referred to Dr. Stolz as the most and best beloved rabbi in Chicago. While some other rabbis spoke derisively and disdainfully of the pastoral rabbi, Dr. Stolz took his pastoral duties seriously and did not hesitate to call on the members of his Congregation, in times of joy or trouble. He was eager to become part of their lives, to understand their souls, to learn their needs and difficulties. He felt that in this way, he could be more helpful and serviceable to them. Some of his sermons are famous. One of them, delivered at Sinai Temple, before the Congress of Liberal Religions, during the Columbian Exposition, was published in 1896, in a volume entitled "Sermons by American Rabbis." In that sermon, Dr. Stolz speaks of the "self-sufficiency of Judaism, that it had no need of learning that the emphasis should be placed on deed and not creed; that its prophets long ago advocated justice and righteousness as against ritualism and ceremonialism." He preached a distinctively Jewish sermon, always based on a biblical text which was logically developed. He rarely if ever reviewed a novel or a book, and did not speak on sensational subjects.

He lived a long life — but there is no merit in simply living a long life if it be empty of service to one's fellow-men. Dr. Stolz lived not only a long life but he lived a beautiful life, a useful life, a fruitful life, a life that was characterized by those virtues which would usher in a better manhood and a recreated humanity.

Dr. Stolz died February 7, 1941, beloved, respected, and

mourned by all who knew him. His funeral obsequies were held in Isaiah Temple, which was crowded by numerous admirers and friends. Dr. Felix A. Levy delivered the eulogy, and Rabbi Morton Berman read the service.

It could have been said of him, as it was said of Moses, "And the man, Joseph, was exceedingly meek." He was diffident to a fault, but he could rise to the height of a righteous indignation when any truth that he held dear was attacked. Whenever the fair name of the Jew, or Judaism, was maligned, he defended it with all the force and power at his command. He struck strong blows in defense of his people, despite his extreme meekness and modesty.

Although his Congregation was his first and main concern, he was interested in everyone of the institutions of the country which could help to further its cause. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee, of the Publication Committee of the Jewish Publication Society, of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, and of the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. For many years, he was president of the Chicago Rabbinical Association and, on his seventieth birthday, he was made Honorary President for life. He was president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1905 to 1907. From 1899 to 1905, he was a member of the Chicago Board of Education, to which he was appointed by Mayor Carter Harrison. These were stormy years for the Board. Superintendents of schools had to be removed and new ones appointed. Dr. Stolz always voted for what he believed would result in the greatest good for the schools of Chicago.

When the history of the charitable institutions and the educational work of Chicago is written, the name of Dr. Stolz must loom large upon its pages. He was distinctively a conserving and constructive force for good in the life of the Jew and Judaism of Chicago. His life was a blessing and his memory will be a benediction not only to all those who knew him or came in contact with him, but also to future generations who will come within the influence of the institutions which he helped to vitalize and maintain.