

## More Pupils Wanted for United Hebrew Schools

Special Interview for the "Zionist Record" with

**Dr. Max Greenberg**

President of United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg.

MUCH interest has lately been aroused in our community by the campaign now being organised for a larger number of children to attend the Talmud Torahs and take advantage of the excellent facilities being offered for Hebrew and religious education.



Dr. Greenberg.

Now that these schools have been able to get clear of the financial morass in which for years they had found themselves, it seems a pity that the classes are not filled to capacity.

In order to gain first-hand information on this important matter, a representative of the *Zionist Record* called upon Dr. Max Greenberg (president of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg). This gentleman is an enthusiastic educationalist and has thrown his energy into the work of improving the Hebrew educational system in the largest Jewish centre in this country.

The first question our representative put to Dr. Greenberg was, "In view of the fact that most Jewish parents give their children some sort of Hebrew education, why are they now being charged with apathy?"

"Because the bulk of them seem to be satisfied with the mere act of sending their children to a Hebrew teacher," replied Dr. Greenberg. "They do not trouble themselves about the nature of the instruction. If the children, after a few years' work, can read Hebrew in a parrot-like manner, without understanding more than a smattering of it—if they know a few detached and paltry stories about our nation's past, a few unrelated laws and customs—the parents are content."

### A "Barmitzvah" Education.

"THE whole aim of most of the Hebrew instruction in this city seems to be to enable a boy to read his Barmitzvah portion creditably. Usually this achievement is celebrated by means of a big party, and the parents receive congratulations on it. In my considered opinion, it is rather a matter for weeping. I say deliberately that it would be better if those children received no Hebrew instruction at all. Consciously and unconsciously, they soon come to compare their Hebrew studies with their secular education, and inevitably they are left with the impression that their peoples' culture, about which they really know less than nothing, is out of date, smacking of the ghetto, unsuited for their needs in a modern world."

### The Private Teacher.

DR. GREENBERG declared that the Jewish population of Johannesburg is estimated at about 25,000. "That means that there are a few thousand children of school-going age. Of this number, about 700 attend the United Hebrew Schools. If you add to these the few hundred more who attend other Talmud Torahs, you must infer that by far the greater number of children are taught privately. It is to this larger section that my previous remarks apply."

"But are not your remarks, then, a severe criticism of the private teachers?"

"Not so much of the private teachers, as of the whole system of private teaching as it is practised

here. The matter is a delicate one, but in the interests of the children I am compelled to speak openly. Let me quote an analogy.

"Suppose a parent wishes to have his child instructed in music. He would not dream of employing anyone whose sole qualifications are that he can play a few tunes and read an elementary score. He would wish, first of all, to be satisfied of the teacher's academic attainments. Next, he would want to know if the instructor, apart from possessing the knowledge, has a suitable pedagogic training.

"Finally, he would demand that the proposed course of study have an adequate and intelligent aim. On all these points he would not be content merely with the teacher's assurance: he would require the endorsement of an independent authority, such as a college of music. This procedure seems obvious in the case of a music teacher, yet, strangely enough, it is seldom employed when a Hebrew teacher is to be engaged.

### Bad Education when Young.

DR. GREENBERG was asked to state his reason as to why it was that the community seemed indifferent to the danger and the problem which he had outlined.

"To them, unfortunately, the matter did not seem urgent," he replied. "They were quite competently conducting the various Jewish institutions in the city. The question of their successors did not arise. Recently, however, a number of them are entertaining the idea of retiring from public life. To their surprise they find that the young people are not showing the slightest interest in communal work. It is true that many of these young people have been brought up in Jewish homes, but they have been rendered antagonistic to Jewish life by the very bad education they received when quite young. The realisation of this is causing some of the apathy to dissolve."

Asked whether the United Hebrew Schools were providing the true kind of Hebrew education, Dr. Greenberg said that before any teacher was engaged they insisted on scholarship, pedagogic qualifications and suitability for local conditions. All candidates must submit themselves to an examination on these points. When he is appointed, the teacher is not left to his own devices but his work is continually supervised by a full-time inspector. Periodical visits are also paid by members of the curriculum committee in order to check the teacher's work.

Dr. Greenberg further explained that the syllabus included Hebrew as a living tongue, Jewish history, religion, Jewish literature, customs and laws.

"The whole aim of our schools is to develop in the children an appreciation of—and love for—our national culture. A large percentage of our advanced pupils—many of them locally born—converse in Hebrew. Any sceptic can visit our classes. Excellent results have been achieved in face of communal indifference. What might not have been done with communal support!"

### 1,500 more Children Wanted.

"How many more pupils can your institution accommodate?"

"At present we can do with 1,500 more children. We have schools in nine suburbs in the town and are ready to establish others if the demand is strong enough and we can secure further material support."

Dr. Greenberg made a final appeal to the Jewish community in Johannesburg to assist in the present "drive" for children. A committee of influential ladies has been formed to conduct the campaign. He earnestly hoped that the parents on their part would rouse themselves to do their share.

"I am confident," he declared finally, "that if the parents will rally round us, we shall enrol a large number of extra children, and the education they will receive will prove of lasting benefit to themselves and the community as a whole."