Rabbi Kook on Art

Kasher Jewish Sculpture

REMBRANDT AND DIVINE LIGHT

By A. MELNIKOFF

As an artist I am interested in the Biblical prohibition of making "graven images," that has had so much influence in the creation of Jewish art.

One day I talked to the late Rabbi Kook about this prohibition. I asked him whether it is true that somewhere in our holy commentaries there is a passage which says that under certain conditions sculpture is allowed to be done by Jews?

The Rabbi knitted his brows. "Let me see, let me see," he was saying to himself. A few moments later he brought down huge *Gemaroth* from the shelves; he piled them up on the table; he opened one after another, moving his delicate fingers along the lines of the holy script as he read. This went on for half-an-hour. He looked like a hunter on the trail, a hunter after truth and knowledge. At last he stood up triumphantly. "Here it is," he said. "Now listen to what our sages say about your question."

I don't remember the exact wording he quoted, but it was something like this—"Our sages say," he read out, "that it is allowed to Jews to make images, if these are done imperfectly and maimed."

This made me laugh.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked.

"In that case," I replied, "I am sure my sculpture is *kasher*."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because my work is far from being perfect."

Now was his turn to laugh. He was all kindness. We talked about Art and he told me the following story:

"When I lived in London I used to visit the National Gallery, and my favourite pictures were those of Rembrandt. I really think that Rembrandt was a *Tzadik*. Do you know that when I first saw Rembrandt's works, they reminded me of the legend about the creation of light? We are told that when God created light, it was so strong and pellucid, that one could see from one end of the world to the other, but God was afraid that the wicked might abuse it. What did He do? He reserved that light for the righteous when the Messiah should come. But now and then there are great men who are blessed and privileged to see it. I think that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his pictures is the very light that was originally created by God Almighty."

I have read much about Rembrandt, but none gives such a vivid description of his genius as this. Only a man as pure of heart and soul as Rabbi Kook could have seen Rembrandt in that light.

Mr. Alfred J. Waley, senior partner in the firm of Messrs. Joseph Sebag & Co., retires this week-end from active Stock Exchange business. Mr. Waley, who is a brother of Mr. Philip S. Waley, has been a member of the Stock Exchange for fifty-three years and a Manager for a quarter-of-a-century. He is retaining the latter office. Mr. Waley is Honorary Treasurer of the Royal Academy of Music.

Central Committee for Jewish Education

A YEAR OF PROGRESS

In the thirteenth Annual Report of the activities of the Central Committee for Jewish Education, under the auspices of the Jewish Memorial Council, mention is made of the consummation of their scheme to increase substantially the revenue for religious education in London. This has been the outstanding feature of the work of the Committee in the year under review. As the result of proposals made by a Sub-Committee appointed to consider what steps could be taken to increase the functions of the Central Committee, the parent bodies of the Shechita Board were approached; and they agreed to allocate to Jewish religious education in London their share of the surplus upon Shechita. This subsidy is to run for an experimental period of three years. The United Synagogue and the Federation of Synagogues also agreed to levy a tax upon tombstones in order further to assist the same cause. The total yield to the Central Committee from both sources at the end of December, 1934, was £3,817.

Professional Auditing

On the question of auditing, the Central Committee (states the Report) came to the following decision:—

"That no grant shall be made to any organisation unless it provides that the only Classes entitled to participate in any grant which it makes out of this or any other funds shall be such Classes as have their accounts audited by a professional Auditor."

Realising that some institutions might not be in a position to pay the cost of a professional audit, the Central Committee further resolved to appoint a firm of auditors to audit, free of any charge, the accounts of any sets of classes or Talmud Torahs which desired to have their services. Grants were renewed during the year to many classes, mainly in small provincial communities. The increase in the cost of the training of teachers may be judged by the fact that in 1921 the amount was £287 as against £827 in 1934. There was an increase during the year of the number of candidates for the Jews' College Teachers' Examinations, and the Alfred Eichholz bursaries have proved a boon to the senior students of the Higher Educational Centre. The issue of the new catalogue of the "Mrs. Nathaniel Cohen Lending Library" has attracted additional readers. The value of the books sold by the Committee from the Books Department during 1934 amounted to about £1,500.

Report of the Director of Jewish Education

There has been a decrease in the number of children taught in the schools and classes, states Mr. H. M. Adler, in his Report. The figures were: Non-Provided Schools 3,598; Jewish Religious Education Board 3,304; Talmud Torahs 3,026; Synagogue Classes 4,289; making a total of 14,217 for 1934 as against 14,717 in the previous year. The expenditure for 1934 was as follows: Non-Provided Schools, £2,529; Jewish Religious Education Board, £7,274; Talmud Torahs, £17,800; Synagogue Classes, £14,069; making a total of £41,672, as against £43,475 in the previous year. The Jewish Religious Education Board, says the Director, have economised to the extent of £400; but the Synagogue Classes, with their growing roll, have spent £600 more. The Report gives details of the visits paid by the Director to Talmud Torahs and classes all over the country, and reference is made to the work being done in religion classes in the Dominions. At Montreal, with a Jewish population of some 60,000 souls and easily the second largest town in the Empire, so far as the Jewish people are concerned (states the Report), there are no Jewish day schools and there is no central organisation for Jewish education. Of the 12,000 Jewish children of school age, only 42 per cent. are receiving Hebrew or religious instruction. At Salisbury, the capital of Southern Rhodesia, there are about 200 Jewish families, 80 of which belong to the Sefardic Community and use French as their vernacular. The Sefardim have a teacher for their children, but there is none for the children of the Ashkenazim.

"A JEWS' SYNAGOGUE"—One of the many etchings by Rembrandt, revealing both his sympathetic understanding of the Jews and his use of light, discussed by the Palestinian sculptor Melnikoff with the late Rabbi Kook in the above article.